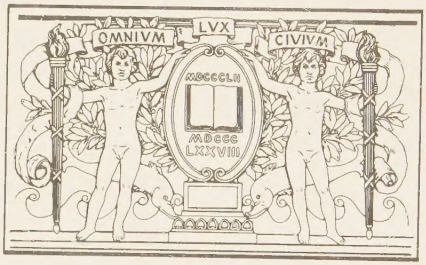
THE OLD WOMAN OF THE MOVIES
AND OTHER STORIES

VICENTE BLASCO IBAÑEZ



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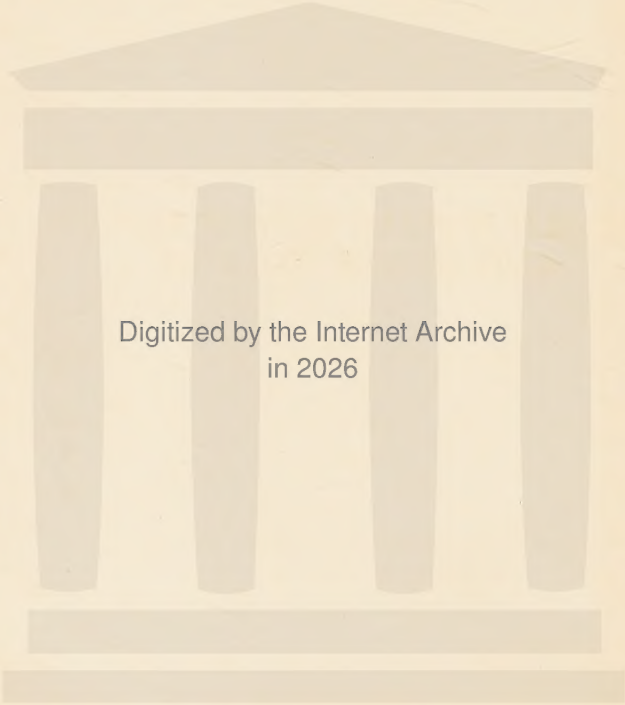
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THE OLD WOMAN OF THE MOVIES AND OTHER STORIES

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

THE FOUR HORSEMEN OF THE APOCALYPSE
BLOOD AND SAND
THE ENEMIES OF WOMEN
LA BODEGA (THE FRUIT OF THE VINE)
MARE NOSTRUM (OUR SEA)
THE MAYFLOWER
MEXICO IN REVOLUTION
THE SHADOW OF THE CATHEDRAL
THE TORRENT
WOMAN TRIUMPHANT
THE TEMPTRESS
THE LAND OF ART
QUEEN CALAFIA
ALFONSO XIII UNMASKED

In Preparation

THE ARGONAUTS
REEDS AND MUD

E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY

THE OLD WOMAN OF THE MOVIES

and Other Stories

BY

VICENTE BLASCO IBAÑEZ
AUTHOR OF *"The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse,"* *"Queen Calafia,"* ETC.

NEW YORK
E. P. DUTTON & COMPANY
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INTRODUCTION

1.

The stories assembled in this collection show a wide range of scene and of mood. They are, as thorough Blasco Ibañez readers will observe for themselves, chips, fragments, parings, that have fallen from his chisel in the hewing of his more massive blocks.

The "Life Sentence" and the "Serenade" recall the glorious Valencian period of *The Cabin, The Mayflower,* and *The Torrent.* The South American tales spring from the inspiration that gushed so exuberantly in *The Argonauts* and less potently in the recent *Temptress.* The two Mexican satires are even more closely associated with the lampoons on *Mexico in Revolution.* "A Serbian Night" and "The Old Woman of the Movies" belong to a group that clusters around the great war books—*The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* and *Mare Nostrum.* If, among these stories, a new tendency, a new atmosphere, be sought in this prolific Spanish writer, it will be found probably in "Sunset," which shows a Blasco Ibañez securely (if temporarily) withdrawn from the tumult of his youthful years, and, *procul negotiis,* gazing at life with serene and melancholy

eyes from a garden of palms and orange trees on the French Riviera.

However, no special effort has been made to compile a representative volume. The intent here has been the wholly practical one of bringing together in convenient form significant stories that now lie scattered in the numerous American reviews and newspapers which have welcomed them during the last six years. But this not arduous task has its incidental satisfactions. Blasco Ibañez is a versatile spirit, incarnate in a still energetic body. From his picturesque figure as a public man his animation radiates far beyond the boundaries of the domain, so called, of pure literature. Newspapermen have honored him as one of the great modern journalists. The world of the cinema play esteems him as its outstanding genius. When he is not founding colonies in South America, he is dismantling reputations in Mexico, or jostling monarchs on European thrones. In the midst of all this success and excitement and movement and noise, these stories may help to remind certain American critics of a fact that W. D. Howells saw fit to emphasize years ago: that Blasco Ibañez, among all the other things that he is, happens also to be an artist.

2.

If I thought that criticism were a mere matter of bouquets—bouquets of cabbages, or bouquets of

roses, according to the whim of the critic—I would merely ask the sceptic to turn to the story called "The Widow's Loan," and then to doff his hat before a specimen of perfect art. But I am even willing to go farther than that and give the substance which lurks behind the general statement that Blasco Ibañez, among other things, is also an artist.

Blasco Ibañez has a formula—of course he has! The formula may, indeed, be simply stated. It consists in appending landscape, color, atmosphere, background—whatever one may choose to call it—to the points, or angles, of a psychological, or dramatic, or sentimental "situation."

The presence of this formula in all of Blasco Ibañez's work explains most of the external characteristics that a not over-subtle criticism has noted in his production—its bulk, its prolixity, its lightness of substance.

Blasco Ibañez sees life in terms of "situation"—an impulse of will, intuited in a rather superficial manner, and brought into conflict with certain mechanical obstacles, the clash never giving rise to deep poetry, or at best giving rise to a sentimentalism that is lachrymose rather than profound. The most obvious feature of Blasco Ibañez in this connection is his fertility. Those critics who think of Blasco Ibañez as a manufacturer of literature do not go far enough. He is a magnate of literature. To a novel-factory employing a thousand "hands," he

could furnish a thousand monthly "plots" that would also be good plots. He has actually more "ideas" among his notes than he could execute in books in a dozen life-times.

And the other half of his formula he tends to apply in a fashion also more or less mechanical. The potential scene of Blasco Ibañez is the whole surface of the earth, including the bottoms of the oceans that encompass the earth. The thousands of plots that he dreams of he locates, progressively and successively, in the various regions of the globe. As a youth he planned a series of novels that would cover our continent from Cape Horn to the Rio Grande. To this, later on, he added the United States. He had already explored Spain, and skirted the Southern coast of France. He had "done" the Mediterranean as fisherman and tourist. He is now drawing a belt around the earth in his *"Vuelta al mundo de un novelista."* And not only the world of the present does he think of in this way. He courses through history in the same spirit, to give at least an appearance of depth to what he sees about him as explorer or adventurer.

Hence the large element, an element sometimes preponderant, of pure description in Blasco Ibañez's novels, a description which, when he is not at his best, tends to overload his plots with a luxuriance greater than they can bear, or to be dragged into

them on pretexts that may seem forced. When he is at his best, as in certain passages of *Mare Nostrum* and in certain episodes of *The Argonauts,* it becomes the source of a rich, however incidental, poetry. For description, in the external sense in which Blasco Ibañez cultivates description, he has undoubted talent. It is the talent which historians have noted to substantiate his classification among the "naturalists," and which, from one of its manifestations in connection with social themes, has suggested placing him in the tradition of Emile Zola. It is a talent for immense perception of detail, which enables him to recall every face in a crowd, every leaf in a forest, every fold in a garment, every lineament in a smile. With it, I may say in passing, is to be associated Blasco Ibañez's greatness as a journalist.

3.

"Situation" and description, furthermore, actually exhaust the perspective of Blasco Ibañez's method as a creative writer. But this fact, which seems so simple, can lead into critical error in two directions, both of which are alternately chosen by certain critics who are willing to be wrong for the pleasure of discounting a celebrity, or for the excitement of flattering one.

One mistake is to depreciate him for not being

all the things that he is not—to ask him for high ideals of life, for portraits of noble men and women, for reverence toward this or that institution, for thought of this brand or of that, for introspection, for compactness of composition, and so on. And the converse of this mistake is to praise him for the fancied possession of one or another or all of those things — keen psychological portraiture, an exalted sense of human sympathy, sensibility (especially for pathos and humor), nobility of liberalism (in *The Horde,* for example), hatred of sham, of hypocrisy, of tyranny, of oppression. Both of these criticisms can, of course, be documented in his work —in the work of what author can they not be documented? Blasco Ibañez is a man of our time, like the rest of us. He has most of our contemporary habits of thought, most of our contemporary ideals of right and wrong, of reform and of revolution, of conservation and of stability, of beauty and of ugliness, of manhood and of bestiality. The point, in criticism, is that it is just as erroneous to damn him because he is not a Sunday schoolma'am, or a sociological agitator, or a hot-house poet, as to praise him because now and again he may chance to look like the first or the second or the third of these.

The other error is, recognizing the two aspects of his practical procedure—"situation," on the one hand, and description, on the other, to seek his art

in the one or the other, exalting the power, or pitying the weakness of his plots, or else lauding the wealth of his description or protesting against its overabundance. The fallacy of such criticism, favorable or unfavorable as it may be, lies in regarding "situation" and description as formal elements in Blasco Ibañez's art; whereas they are purely material elements. They are the things with which his art deals, not the things which make him an artist.

And the proof of all this is the significant fact that the more our so-called "high brow" criticism disparages Blasco Ibañez, the more solid is his hold upon his public. It is admitted, generally, I suppose, that vogue is not a test of artistic merit, that "success," in the material sense of the term, relates to the practical utility, rather than to the spiritual vitality, of an artistic creation. However, the vogue of Blasco Ibañez is too extensive, and his successive reincarnations as novelist, story-teller, cinema author, publicist and journalist, have been too numerous, to be explained by sheer weight of publicity. There must be some fire where there is so much smoke.

4.

The trait in Blasco Ibañez which the public always senses though the critic does not always see it, the trait which dominates his work from beginning to

end, and indeed his career in all its picturesque ups and downs, in all its dazzling variety, is a naive, and unthinking, and almost child-like enjoyment of life.

To Blasco Ibañez the thinker—and as a thinker he rarely thinks in earnest, so true is it that his central problem is artistic rather than intellectual—life appears as subject to varied analysis. Indeed, it matters little to him what systems of thought he uses to reduce the chaos of detail he observes in the world to some sort of workable unity. Blasco Ibañez's intellectual being is a creature largely of environment—he is a Valencian Republican of the last decade of the Nineteenth Century, who happens also to have travelled abroad. Analyze carefully his famous "situations," and the emotional emanations they provoke, and it will be seen that his concepts of life are for the most part sentimental, and borrowed even from his predecessors in literary history —now from Victor Hugo, now from Guy de Maupassant, now from Balzac, now from Cervantes.

But however he may conceive of life, however he may interpret it in its lights and shadows, Blasco Ibañez always *enjoys* it. He is glad to be alive, and he is glad that others are alive, and he is glad that he and they have such a big world, and such a full world, and such a beautiful world to live in and do the wonderful and curious and amusing things that he, and they, do. Blasco Ibañez is the child at the

fair, the countryman in the city, the visitor from abroad, discovering a universe ever new and strange. He delights in what he sees and he delights in everything he sees. This is the source of his so-called "naturalism" in all its detail, a detail which, in his moments of high tension, gives the full sense of reality to Blasco Ibañez's people, scenery, and costume, and even to his "situations." For these too, when recorded on a photographic plate, reduce to wholly external details of line or shape or color. Thus it also comes about that the wonderment of Blasco Ibañez takes on a multiple form and acquires universal significance; for the moods which emanate from his situations or descriptions, or rather from his situations which are always described, are moods arising from the completeness and reality of a picture, rather than from any deliberate intent of the artist.

5.

So far as the short stories of Blasco Ibañez are distinguishable from his longer novels it is only in the superficial sense that they put definite limits to this exultant joy in externals which tends to run riot in his vaster panoramas. Underneath, the method of procedure is the same, and the spiritual needs which they satisfy in the author are the same. It is true, nevertheless, that in his short stories, by

the simple fact that they are short, the descriptive content is more completely taken up and digested in the "situation," more wholly harmonious with it. It is this harmony that makes "The Widow's Loan" the gem that it is—a poem of the South American deserts, with a humble half-breed lost in its vast silences. It is the harmony that gives speed and rapidity to the "Hero" (a theme of Daudet, added to a mood of Flaubert or of De Maupassant), and to the "Caburé Feather," not to mention the "Serenade," from Blasco Ibañez's older fund.

Doubtless, in Blasco Ibañez's long novels, it is his sentimentality, his power of depicting elemental emotions in simple outlines, that explains much of his success with such large numbers of people. Certain doses of the same sentimentality reappear in some of these stories—those, in particular which date from the World War. "The Four Sons of Eve" shows the author in one of his whimsical veins, with just a suggestion of social satire. But even in a wholly fanciful realm, Blasco Ibañez cannot entirely forsake very definite scenes in a very definite part of the world, the observation of which in all its color and variety is his fundamental satisfaction.

ARTHUR LIVINGSTON.

New York,
March, 1925

THE OLD WOMAN OF THE MOVIES AND OTHER STORIES

THE OLD WOMAN OF THE MOVIES

The police commissioner curiously surveyed the gray-haired woman who had sat down before his desk unbidden; then he dropped his eyes to read the report submitted by the officer who stood rigid by his armchair.

"Disorderly conduct in a moving-picture theatre," the chief read aloud; "abusive language against the authorities, resisting and assaulting an officer. What do you have to say for yourself?"

The prisoner, who had been looking at the commissioner and his subordinate as if she did not see them, gave a start of surprise; she seemed to have been suddenly aroused from a deep reverie.

"Commissioner," she began, "I sell garden produce in the morning. I don't own a shop; I carry my vegetables in a little push-cart and sell them in the Rue Trepic. Everybody knows me where I live. I've done business there for over forty years and——"

The officer tried to interrupt her but she flared up.

"If *Monsieur le Commissaire* does not let me speak! . . . Everyone expresses himself as he can and answers as his intelligence permits him."

The Commissioner reclined in his armchair, threw back his head and began to play with his letter-opener. He was used to talkative prisoners who would prattle everlastingly. Patience!

"In 1870, at the time of the other war," the old woman continued, "I was twenty-two years old. My husband was a national guardsman during the siege of Paris; I was the *vivandière* of his battalion. In one of the sorties against the Prussians my man was wounded and I saved his life. Afterward I had to work very hard to support my crippled soldier and our only daughter. . . . My husband died; my daughter died also, leaving me two grandchildren."

She paused to see whether they were listening to her. She was not sure that they were. The police-officer remained rigid and silent, like a good soldier, close to his superior's armchair. The commissioner whistled softly, fingering the letter-opener nervously, his eyes on the ceiling.

"My granddaughter Juliet," continued the ex-*vivandière* undisturbed by her unsympathetic audience, "dances in the theatres and is famous. *Monsieur* must have seen her picture often in the papers and street-corner signs. I meet her only once in a long while. One day as I was pushing my little cart her automobile nearly ran over me. This made her cry. 'It's your fault, grandma,' she said. 'Why do you insist on peddling things?' I had to do it

when she and her brother were little, to support them. . . . I like it. Everyone is as he is. Although I am poor, I don't like the way these artists live. Am I wrong, *monsieur?*"

The commissioner had stopped whistling and was examining the prisoner with a certain interest. Perhaps he knew her granddaughter, the celebrated dancer. He was going to ask her about the artist when the old woman continued.

"My favorite was Albert, a laborer who loved books. Although I have always preferred to be independent, I visited him every day, I helped his wife and played with his son. A great-grandson, *monsieur*. Think how happy I was! Not everybody can live to have great-grandchildren."

She stopped a moment, lost in tender reminiscences.

"Alas, the happy days before the War!" she added. "One Sunday we went out to the country to celebrate; we had our picnic on the banks of the Seine. Albert had just been made head foreman of his factory. . . . Two weeks later the War broke out."

The commissioner made a deprecating gesture which the old woman attributed to tiredness.

"Yes," she said promptly, "I know we have had four years of war and that it bores everyone to hear about it. They tell me that even the theatres and newspapers are sick of the War and its adventures.

And my story is like the story of so many, many women! . . .

"Albert joined his regiment in the first days of the mobilization. I did not see him until a year later when he returned from the front in his soldier's uniform. Afterward, he came back a second time. I had finally become accustomed to his absence. I thought that only the other men could die. But my Albert! . . . One day I received a piece of paper that made his wife and me cry. Later one of the comrades of my grandson called to bring a few objects which had belonged to him."

The old woman's voice broke down. "I never saw him again, *monsieur*. They killed him!"

But remembering her promise, she made an effort to calm herself and avoid talking about the War.

"Albert's widow is working now in a munition factory at the other side of Paris, and I see my great-grandson only once in a long while. One has to make a living. . . . And, why shouldn't I say so? Since Albert's death, I go to the tavern more than before. Every one drowns his sorrows the best way he knows. I am in my seventies already and at this age when one has to get up before dawn to go to the Central Markets to buy goods, a little glass is the best of medicine. Don't you think so, *monsieur?*"

The dignified silence maintained by the functionary was meant to impress upon the prisoner the utter

impropriety of her question. But she continued with a certain nervous haste which showed that she was approaching the most interesting part of her story.

"To-night after supper, I went to the tavern with Uncle Crainquebille. Perhaps *monsieur* knows him. His misfortunes have been described in books and comedies."

The name of Crainquebille awakened vague recollections in the commissioner's memory. The statement that the adventures of the man were written in books stimulated his mental search for a clue. He finally shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of indifference.

"His life," continued the market woman, "has been written by a certain *Monsieur* Anatole who works on the other side of the Seine, in a factory of learned men. It is a palace with a dome where they prepare recipes to teach rich folks how to speak well."

The commissioner sat bolt upright in his chair, completely taken by surprise. That "factory of learned men" on the opposite bank of the Seine was, undoubtedly, the French Academy; the house with the dome must be the Institute, and the *Monsieur* Anatole could not be anybody else but Anatole France.

"But, Uncle Crainquebille really exists?" he asked incredulously.

"I have known him for the past thirty years, *monsieur*. We do business in different parts of the city but we see each other every morning when we make our purchases and we meet again every evening in the tavern. The poor fellow! His affairs are not very prosperous now; he works little. *He knows too much!*" she whispered, leaning forward as if she wanted the secret to remain strictly between the commissioner and herself. "His protector has taught him a great many things, which he tells me, and I spend hours and hours listening to him in the tavern."

She paused before picking up again the thread of her story.

"As I was saying, Uncle Crainquebille and I meet in the tavern every evening. To-night, about nine o'clock, we left the wine-shop together, and I don't know why, I stopped in front of a moving-picture house and was tempted to go in. My eye was caught by a poster in which a very beautiful Alsatian girl was defending herself against a ferocious Hun. I love stories of this sort; I am very patriotic, perhaps because I have seen two wars. . . . But let's not speak about the War.

"Uncle Crainquebille refused to go in, even though I offered to pay. Really, I don't know what he likes; everything makes him smile. Well, I went in alone . . . with very bad luck. Hasn't *monsieur*

noticed how sometimes everything turns out wrong, and how when we try to please people we hurt their feelings, as if the devil were guiding us?"

The commissioner did not deign to answer.

"I quarreled with the box-office lady about a coin. She said the coin was no good and would not accept it. I said the coin was good, and then I got angry and told her she didn't know her nose from a . . . Well, then the doorkeeper interfered; it was none of his business, but he must play the gallant and come to defend the lady. I had to give him a piece of my mind. . . . Inside, in the theatre, the same bad luck! My neighbors in the row complained that I had stepped on them and called me 'a tough old hag.' I hadn't stepped on them! It was just ill-will on their part; I don't like to annoy people. A stuck-up dame who sat near me had the nerve to say that I smelled like a wine-cask. A wine-cask, *monsieur!* Another insolent brute spoke about my plumpness and bet that *it* would not fit the seat. I told him what I thought of him, and the public protested vigorously, claiming that I was spoiling the show. If I stopped at last it was because the story of the Alsatian girl had begun. A most interesting story, *monsieur!* I'd love to tell it to you, but I am afraid I'd be boring you. Anyway, I don't know how it ends; they would not let me see the rest of it."

The commissioner had turned his eyes once more

to the ceiling and was whistling softly to relieve his feelings.

"A gentleman who sat behind me and who seemed to know a great deal about the movies, was giving his opinion of the film to his neighbors in a low voice. . . . Suddenly the Alsatian girl flees to the front, trying to escape from her pursuer, and they begin to show the trenches full of soldiers, camp-kitchens, guns. The well-informed gentleman behind me said that these war views were a part of history, that they were . . . how shall I say? . . . clippings which they had tagged on the film. Am I making myself clear, *monsieur?* Old things of the War which they had used, something like the patches which we sew on old clothes to make them better. . . . But I don't know anything about moving pictures. I thought the views were fine.

"And then they threw upon the screen the interior of a trench where many soldiers were resting. One of them was writing a letter on his knee, his back turned to the public. Little by little he turns his head around and smiles at the public. I rubbed my eyes, *monsieur!* I thought I was seeing things. Then . . . I must have screamed. . . . It was my grandson! . . .

"I stood up to see him better. I tried to run out to embrace my Albert. Perhaps I stepped over the people roughly; the public may have thought I was

attempting to pull off a hoax, and the employees intervened. Many spectators got up and stopped me. They would not listen to my explanations; they believed that I was drunk. They began to push me toward the door and I had to use my fists to defend myself. Then they called in the officer who stands by your side. They say I insulted him; that I bit his hand. I don't know how it could have happened. I must have been mad at that moment. It is true that the officer pushed me out of the theatre and dragged me here without allowing me to explain; he would not let me stay to see my Albert . . ."

There was a long pause. The eyes of the old woman began to fill with tears.

"And that's how I met my grandson again," the prisoner concluded. "I beg the commissioner's pardon . . ."—a humble bow to the chief—"and I beg the officer's pardon"—another bow to her captor.

Then she bent her head, clasped her hands and lowered her eyes, taking voluntary refuge in silence and trusting her defense to luck, while tears streamed down her cheeks.

The commissioner remained silent for a while, and then cast a glance at the officer who stood near him—a veteran with the *Croix de Guerre* on his breast and a few stripes on his sleeves which indicated the length of his war service. The officer glanced back at his superior. Until now he had

listened impassively, although he had bit his long mustache several times. Both men seemed to have understood each other with a look. The commissioner handed back to the officer the paper which the latter had placed on his desk—a report written by him half an hour before in the waiting-room of the district police headquarters giving an account of the disorder which had occurred in the cinema. The veteran tore the paper without saying a word.

"My good woman, you may go." The voice of the commissioner brought the prisoner back from her reverie. Was it true that they were setting her free? Could she go? How kind they were!

"And may I go back to the movies?" she asked anxiously. "Will they let me see my little one every evening?"

The two men had to laugh at her simplicity, and told her that she could see her "little one" as long as she pleased.

She walked out of the police headquarters with dignity. It would never do to have people see her flee like one whose conscience is not clear! But when she reached the street and looked in all directions she saw that no one was spying on her. Picking up her skirts she ran with youthful speed. Her wrinkled face expanded with her labored breath; her gray hair escaped in disorder from under the knitted triangular shawl which covered her head.

When she reached the cinematograph the last groups of spectators were coming out. The employees were extinguishing the lights and removing the signs. She watched them close the doors. Motionless, with an elbow resting against the wall and her forehead in her hand, she stood in front of the amusement hall crying with the desolation of a lost child.

"To have to wait until to-morrow," she moaned. "To have to wait until to-morrow to see my little one!"

On the following night the old woman entered the moving picture theatre with humility. She shrank to escape detection. When she approached the ticket window, she turned her face aside so that the box-office lady might not notice her. But the doorkeeper recognized her.

"Oh, no! Are you coming round to start another row? . . . There is no ticket for you," he said, running to drive her out.

"Let me go in, kind sir," she begged. "I come to see my grandson. I promise you that I shall make no trouble."

Her childish humbleness completely disarmed the employee; and he and the box-office lady laughed and let her in. The old woman bowed to them gratefully. She bowed also to a policeman who stood guard in the entry, as if he were an old friend. He

did not look like the officer of the previous night, but she was taking no chances.

Once inside, she displayed a modesty and obsequiousness really touching. She greeted every spectator she met with exaggerated courtesy, receiving no recognition; some merely glared at her with surprise and annoyance.

"Crazy!" their looks seemed to say.

She shrank in her seat trying to occupy the least possible space, lest her neighbors be disturbed. At first she turned her head around repeatedly to see whether she was being observed by the ushers and to find out whether her behavior merited their approval.

The beginning of the spectacle made her forget the world and its realities. The *boche* had started to pursue the Alsatian girl; the complicated episodes of the cinematographic drama had begun to unroll on the screen. Soon appeared the trenches and the soldier with his back to the audience who was writing a letter on his knee and who showed his face when he smilingly turned his head around.

"Albert! . . . Albert! . . ."

The poor woman had to make an enormous effort to control herself. This cry rose to her throat with waves of despair. But she trembled at the idea of provoking the wrath of the audience as she had done the night before. They would throw her out and

refuse her further admission: she would not see her soldier again.

Fear held her back and her violent emotion melted into tears. To get some relief she spoke in a very low voice, a voice which sounded inward smothering its echoes in her broken heart, while her wet eyes continued to watch devotedly the episodes of the screen drama.

"Albert! . . . *mon petit! C'est moi,* don't you know me? . . . I shall come to see you every night, every night!"

The following night she cried less. She was beginning to get used to the vision. After the performance she spoke to the doorkeeper with a certain familiarity as if she also were one of the staff.

"Have you seen how well my grandson acts?" she asked him.

And the doorkeeper who listened to her story without paying any special attention to it, lifted a finger to his forehead and winked at the box-office lady. She shot back a smile of approval which seemed to say:

"Yes, she is crazy—crazy as a loon!"

The old woman hardly slept that night. Her conscience troubled her. She was selfish; she was keeping for herself all the joy derived from her discovery. Albert had in the world of the living others besides her.

On the following morning she sold her vegetables hastily without giving much thought to profits and put away her push-cart earlier than her competitors. Then she took the subway to the outskirts of Paris. When she reached her destination she found herself in a dull gray and arid landscape studded with smoking factories and brick buildings, ugly and gloomy like prisons, where the families of the operatives were quartered. She spoke to the janitress of one of these tenements. Her great-grandson had been sent to school. Albert's widow was working in the factory. She went then to the factory, and the janitor, an invalid, stopped her. Impossible to admit her. No one was allowed to see the shops because they were turning guns. But the old woman stuck tenaciously to the gate whence she could see many women pass to and fro in the various evolutions of their work, wearing overalls with baggy trousers which gave them the appearance of cyclists.

When the noon bell rang and the operatives came out to lunch, the old woman succeeded in speaking to her granddaughter-in-law. The widow's face was ashy pale; her eyes, larger than ever, were shadowed by dark rings. She broke into sobs when she heard that her husband appeared in the movies every night despite the fact that he had been dead for over a year.

"How can that be, grandma?" she asked incredulously.

Her amazement was so great that she stopped crying. She made hopeless attempts to understand her grandmother who repeated the explanations which she had heard in the theatre, although she did not understand them any better than her granddaughter.

"The fact is that Albert is appearing in the movies. Bring your boy. I'll be looking for you to-night." She extended her invitation with the imperiousness of a queen who orders a subject to present himself at a palace function. At eight o'clock they would find her waiting outside the theatre, situated at the opposite extreme of Paris. After this they separated again, for the poor have no time to waste.

The old woman had the satisfaction of seeing them arrive on time. The widow wore a plain ready-made black dress; the child was dressed in his best clothes, his hair trimmed so that he looked like a page.

When the widow tried to buy the tickets, the old woman protested vigorously. "What do you mean? I pay for the tickets. I know the owners of this theatre; they treat me like one of the family." And to show her influence with them, she joked with the

lady at the box-office. Later she shook hands with the doorkeeper, her old enemy, and gave him a cheap cigar which she had bought a few moments before.

"Little gifts maintain friendship. Please accept this, my good friend."

Inside, she greeted the usher like an old friend.

"The wife and child of my grandson, who takes part in the films," she said, introducing her family and tipping the usher with a few copper coins. And she sat down proudly in the seat designated by the employee as if she considered it the best in the house.

But the satisfaction of showing her protégés the influence she exerted in that public place was short-lived. She was afraid that when Albert appeared the little woman in mourning next to her would make a scene. The widow, however, was one of those who bear their sorrows in silence. She watched the vision with dilated pupils which reminded one of the eyes of morphine fiends. She bit her lips in an effort to control her feelings while tears streamed down her wan cheeks.

The little page observed the film with the innocence of that age in which we hear of death without knowing what it is. He recognized the soldier who smiled at the public. He had seen him come home once dressed just like that.

Why didn't he return? . . .

"Papa . . . papa," he murmured, stretching his

little hands toward the figure, begging it to come to him. And the mother and great-grandmother crying their hearts out, pulled him gently in the darkness to keep him quiet.

After the performance, just before bidding them good night at the door of the amusement-hall, the grandmother assumed once more her imperious air.

"To-morrow here again at the same hour; I pay!"

"I live at the opposite side of Paris, grandma," objected the widow, "I have to get up early to go to work. There is the child who must be got ready to send to school. It's impossible . . . And, what is the use of coming again? Albert will not return to life, and this picture is killing me."

The old woman eyed the widow dubiously as the latter walked away leading her sleepy child by the hand. She had always suspected that this little woman had no heart.

"Ay! The only one who really remembers Albert is his poor grandmother."

She was sad and out of sorts all the next day. At nightfall she joined Uncle Crainquebille in the tavern. Although the market philosopher lived amid things and persons without bothering his head about them, he seemed to take an interest in the affairs of his old friend. In the last few days she had become a changed woman. She spent a great deal of money; treated everybody, arrived late at the markets buying

the dearest articles, to sell them later cheaper than any other vendor.

"You are ruining yourself; you are spending your capital," the philosopher chided. Despite this advice, however, Uncle Crainquebille continued to drink all the glasses which his liberal friend offered him.

At eight o'clock the old woman grew impatient.

"Good-bye, Crainquebille. I must go for my grand-daughter to take her to see her brother. You know that he is performing in the movies?"

"But your grandson was killed! . . ."

"It is true that he was killed, but he is performing in the movies all the same."

The philosopher shrugged his shoulders. It was useless to say anything. His teacher and protector had taught him that we should not be disturbed at anything in this world. Even the simplest and commonest actions prove incoherent when we examine them closely. It is useless, therefore, to expect to find a logical explanation for the extraordinary events of our life.

After pushing the button of the gate bell, the old woman examined her black silk dress. It harked back to the days of her poor daughter. She had made it, although hardly anything remained of the original fashion after the various alterations which had followed one another at long intervals. She admitted that the dress did not look badly at all.

Somewhat out of fashion, but a good piece of cloth is always appreciated by the intelligent. Her head was bare. She was proud of the abundance and glossiness of her beautiful soft white hair.

She admired the small and elegant house behind the iron railing, surrounded by a few trees. Just think all a woman can make with her feet! . . . But the approach of a young girl with white apron and cap cut short her inspection of the premises. This modish person had come in response to the bell. The old woman took an immediate dislike to her on account of her boyish ways, the haughty look with which she eyed her from top to toe, and her brusk tones.

"Good woman, if you have come to beg alms from the mistress, come some other day; she is not in."

The old woman shook with indignation. She had begun to shoot terrible shafts of irony at the flat chest of the maid, and her boyish angularity, raising rapidly the diapason of her insults, when she felt that some one was holding her by the shoulders. She turned around and saw standing at the gate an automobile that had just pulled up. A fashionable lady had stepped out of the car and was smiling at her, trying to embrace her.

"Grandma! Grandma!"

The first thing that the old woman noted was that the famous dancer wore mourning, an expensive and

exceedingly flashy mourning, but, after all, a mourning which could only be for her brother Albert. She found herself gently pushed inside the gate.

The old woman experienced one surprise after another as she saw the rooms of the dancer's house. There was a profusion of low couches, the floor was littered with cushions. The few pieces of furniture were so fragile that she did not dare touch them; the color of the walls and curtains so complicated that it made her dizzy.

When she mentioned Albert's name, the dancer was deeply moved.

"How I have felt his loss!" she said, her eyes wet with tears. "We didn't get along; he could not understand my way of living. But I loved him dearly."

She took a photograph prominently displayed on a small table and kissed it. It was Albert's picture. The faithfulness in conserving the memory of the dead brother touched the grandmother. And they had the audacity to say that Juliet was this and the other thing on account of her profession and the way she lived! . . . Lies! She was the best little girl in the world!

The old woman's enthusiasm cooled somewhat when she noted the serenity with which the dancer listened to the account of the discovery in the movies.

"It is curious, really curious," was all Juliet had

to say about it. And she guessed what her grandmother wanted.

"You want to take me to see him, don't you? . . . All right; I'll go with you to-night, but on one condition only; that you stay to supper with me."

The thought of her brother had awakened other memories in her mind.

"Ay, grandma! Poor Albert was not the only one who went off to war. There are others who are still alive, and those who are alive inspire greater fear than the ones who are dead."

She was thinking of her friend, a rich young man whom the market woman had never seen; according to public rumors he would eventually marry Juliet.

They could not chat any more. It was time for tea and Juliet's lady friends began to arrive all decked in ultra-fashionable gowns, rare and flashy dresses which made the old woman dizzy and shook her faith in the status of her granddaughter. Some of the ladies envied Juliet her mourning despite their multi-colored attire. One of them went further in the expression of her opinions:

"How lucky to have some one dead in the family. Black is so becoming!"

All smoked. They had thrown themselves on the floor over white bear skins or on round, fluffy sofa pillows. Some stretched their limbs like lazy animals without regard to what they exposed to view; others

crossed their arms over their propped-up knees and rested their chins on them.

The tea service lay on the floor in a great silver tray, the alcohol lamp sending up an almost invisible column of curling bluish smoke.

Juliet had presented her grandmother to her friends courageously.

"This is my grandmother who sells garden truck every morning in the Rue Trepic. I am as proud of my ancestors as any descendant of the Crusaders might be of hers."

General laughter. But the ladies gradually forgot the old woman. The latter wanted to get away. She did not approve of these customs, but at the same time she was afraid of offending her granddaughter. She moved cautiously from one chair to another, as a little girl who is plotting to slip out of a crowded parlor, until she reached the dining-room. There she regained courage, and straightening up fearlessly she ventured into the next corridor. She almost ran into the maid who was returning to the parlor with hot water for the tea, and she greeted her with an implacable snort.

"Prig! . . . Cat! . . ." she hissed.

After delivering herself of this supreme insult she felt more nimble and began to descend the steps which led to the kitchen. Here she admired more

than up-stairs the wealth of her granddaughter. What a lot of pots as bright as suns!

The cook did the honors of her dominions, placing upon the table a bottle and two glasses. They drank all of it, discussing their sorrow. Then the cook drew out a picture, kissed it and showed it to her visitor.

"My son is a *Chasseur Alpine,* what they call a blue devil; he is in the Vosges."

The old market-woman, not to be outdone, drew out also another portrait.

"My grandson was killed, but he is now appearing every night in the movies."

The cook moved nervously in her chair, opening her eyes wide. Positively the old woman must be crazy. But, of course, she was the grandmother of the mistress.

The market-woman stayed in this paradise till supper-time, admiring its magnificence. Later when she found herself in the dining-room seated at an enormous table with her granddaughter, and her young women friends, she felt homesick and utterly out of her atmosphere. She disliked the dishes but admitted that she had never eaten so well before, but she was dying to have it over as soon as possible.

She glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece. It was almost eight.

"Don't be in a hurry, grandma," Juliet told her. "We have plenty of time."

Suddenly there was a commotion in the house—ringing of bells, shrieks of surprise, banging of doors, men's voices.

The servant burst in crying:

"Madam . . . It's the master!"

She did not say any more, but the old woman guessed the rest. The "master" could only be a certain person. The old woman rose with frowning gravity. There was one person too many in the room; and she knew who that person was. And then a fine-looking young man in the uniform of an aviator blew in like a water-spout. He did not have to advance much for the dancer flew into his arms.

A few moments before Juliet had been speaking of him with undisguised sadness. She had not seen him for six months. He had found it impossible to obtain leave until now.

"An unexpected leave . . . A brief mission in Paris . . . twenty-four hours only . . ." the aviator explained, his emotion almost choking him. But he could not go on. The lovers had clasped each other in a passionate embrace and their tremulous bodies oscillated under the impulse of their feelings. A volley of sonorous kisses, nearly as loud as the explosions of uncorked champagne, rent the silence of the room.

When she saw her go out, Juliet broke loose from the arms of her lover, and ran to intercept her grandmother.

"You see, grandma, he has come for twenty-four hours only. It's impossible to-day . . . Some other time. We must look after the living first."

The old woman found herself alone in the dark and frozen street. The public lights, hooded as a precaution against aerial attacks, shone with a very faint glow which only served to emphasize the deeper shadow which surrounded them. As she walked, she kept on repeating the same words, as in a litany.

"Life demands life; the living need life. Alas for the dead! The dead flee more hastily than the living!"

All forgot the dead! Even in the theatre she noted this ingratitude. That night only a score of spectators had come. The public of this district cinema was tired of the adventures of the Alsatian girl and her pursuer. They knew them by heart already.

The old woman sat down with the dignity of a monarch who has ordered a performance for his own exclusive delectation. When her grandson appeared, she spoke to him with sad gentleness.

"Good evening, *mon petit*. All are abandoning you, all are forgetting you. Life is like that. But never mind; your grandmother will never leave you. Here you will find me every night . . . every night!"

The report began to circulate in the early hours of the afternoon, at first vague and indefinite. "Peace . . . Peace has been declared!" But, alas! the news had been so frequently announced before, without confirmation, that the old woman did not believe it. About mid-afternoon, however, everybody was convinced that it was true. The government had made public the existence of an armistice.

Without any clear idea of when or how it happened, the produce vendor found herself in the midst of an avalanche of people who surged irresistibly around her and swept her on toward the center of the city. She had caught the spirit of the crowds; frantic with joy, she shouted with the delirious throngs that filled the streets, and until dusk she lived as in a dream. She had a faint notion that the whole thing was a nightmare, replete with extravagant incidents. An agreeable nightmare whose ravings were born of enthusiasm, not of terror.

She had reached the Place de la Concorde. The multitude was singing patriotic airs and dragging the guns captured from the Germans which had been placed on exhibition in the great square. A group of young fellows made her climb on the top of one of the field pieces, and carried her in triumph through the nearby streets. Her white hair flowing in the breeze, she raised her arms aloft and sang *"La Marseillaise."* She was greeted everywhere with

thunderous applause. No one knew who she was but her presence aroused that instinctive veneration which old age always inspires. Some saw in her the glory of the Revolution triumphantly reawakened from a lethargy of more than a century.

Suddenly she found herself afoot and alone. The gun and the youths who were dragging it had disappeared. She was now in the Rue Royale, opposite the most fashionable row of restaurants. The patrons of Maxim's—rich people who could afford the luxury—were donating bottles of champagne to the crowd in honor of the great event.

Later, before she knew it, she was talking to a group of American soldiers. She adored the Americans. She knew they were Americans because they wore broad-brimmed felt hats with pointed tops. Fine-looking boys, healthy, strong, good-natured. Many of them reminded her of Albert.

"Hurrah for the United States!" she shouted.

They understood her gestures and winks far better than her words, but it made no difference to her. All one needs to get along with a foreigner is a little sympathy and good will. Infected by the contagious happiness of the old woman, the American soldiers laughed like big children, with boisterous guffaws which showed their strong jaws and splendid ivory-like teeth.

She kept her entire resources, the capital with

which she carried on her ambulant business, in a linen bag fastened to her waist under the skirt. After sounding this and satisfying herself that she had enough money to treat her new friends, she made it clear by an adequate number of gestures and winks that she would pay for the drinks. But the Americans protested good-naturedly. The idea of permitting a woman to treat! The one who spoke French best explained:

"We are richer than you; we are paid in dollars."

She looked at the copper coins she had in her hand. *Centimes* only! But what difference did it make? . . .

"No, no," she objected vigorously. "You are now in my house. I insist on treating you, and if you refuse me. . . . Say, you wouldn't make an old woman cry, would you?"

They entered a café, and for a whole half hour the robust soldiers with pointed hats drank, celebrating with uproarious laughter the words and gestures of the merry old woman. Later, she found herself drinking with men of the other countries who wore different uniforms and with French poilus whose gloomy aspect, in sharp contrast with the universal mad joy of the day, seemed to show that they had not entirely awakened from the horrible nightmare that had lasted four years.

At dusk the market-woman was exhausted. Her

bones ached as if the multitude had tramped on her, as if she had received a million blows. Her own instinct carried her homeward, step by step, her sore feet dragging on the pavement. But despite her fatigue she joined every shouting group that she met. The need of rest and force of habit made her seek the tavern, where she found Crainquebille sitting alone, peering gloomily into a small empty glass which he had in front of him.

"I invite you also," the old woman told him. "This is a great day, Crainquebille. Peace! What do you think of peace?"

Crainquebille shrugged his shoulders. Aroused by the sight of the new glass which the *garçon* was serving him, he condescended to speak.

"Perhaps humanity will try to be better after this terrible trial. It is possible that it will regenerate and live for the first time with a little logic."

Then he smiled ironically, like his master. Once more possessed by eternal doubt, he added:

"Although, as a matter of fact, no one can say whether this poor humanity is worth regenerating. Perhaps it is useless even to ponder about its future. . . ."

Later on, the old woman felt the urge of another pleasure. She remembered with delight the dark moving-picture theatre and its entrancing visions—visions which she considered heavenly. What a joy

to sit there for two whole hours in a comfortable chair chatting mentally with her grandson! Poor Albert probably had not heard yet the great news which had made such a sensation in Paris and in the whole world. She would tell him about it.

"Good night, Crainquebille," she said. "My grandson is waiting for me. No holiday for my poor little one. He works to-night like any other night."

The errant philosopher who had cheerfully accepted the make-believe life of his old friend, felt bound to offer a word of advice.

"You are killing yourself; you are eating too little and drinking too much; you are throwing away your money; before long you will have no capital left. Yesterday you had to buy half of your stock on credit. . . . In a week you seem to have lived several years."

But after this sensible reprimand, he smiled again his eternal smile of doubt and subtle irony.

"Well! If this amuses you . . . if you find your happiness in it . . ." And he shrugged his shoulders.

The old woman hastened away toward the cinematograph despite her benumbed legs which almost refused to move. She would rest comfortably in that agreeable hall. The city was still darkened, as during the War with its nights full of aerial perils; animated groups of people thronged the streets,

bands played and the joyous crowds improvised dancing at every crossing.

When she entered the foyer of the theatre, the doorkeeper greeted her merrily. He, too, was as happy as the rest of them.

"Hurrah for peace, grandma!" he exclaimed. Then, as if he remembered something of scant importance, he added with indifference: "Your grandson quit work last night . . . Gone! Brand-new program. Something worth while, grandma."

"What? . . ."

The old woman had leaned against the wall to support herself; she was intensely pale and her eyes seemed about to leap out of their orbits. The employee volunteered a few more remarks in answer to her exclamation of distress.

"The week is over, grandma. We change the program every seven days. The public was tired to death of the Alsatian girl and the *boche*. Now that we have peace we must give something else. No more war stuff. People want to forget the War and be happy. . . . Come in. There is an American film to-night, very funny . . . you will surely laugh."

The old woman staggered, although the slight disturbance of her faculties caused by a mild intoxication had instantly subsided.

"I sha'n't see him again," she moaned. "I sha'n't see him again." Then she summed up her

despair in a phrase. "They have killed him a second time."

The spectators who were coming in crowded around the fainting woman. And the doorkeeper, out of regard for her, and to avoid a jam at the entrance, did his best to cheer her up.

"Cheer up, grandma," he said. "You certainly are not going to die on such a day as this simply because we changed the program! . . . Anyway . . . anyway . . . Let me see." He asked the box-office lady for a paper, which he began to read anxiously, rising on tiptoe to receive the light of a ceiling lamp. "Let's see . . ." he continued, talking to himself, "this stupid picture of the Alsatian girl ought to be exhibited somewhere. A rotten film, pieced together out of odds and ends. They are probably showing it in some third-rate theatre. . . . That's it: here it is."

And he gave the old woman the name of a street and a moving-picture hall.

"A little far, grandma, in Grenelle, on the opposite side of Paris. Take the tube. You can see your grandson there for a whole week." And after this he paid no further attention to her, for he was too busy handling the large crowd that had come attracted by the new program.

The old woman found herself once more in the street. She had an obsession, a fixed idea. "They killed him again," she kept on repeating. "On this

day when everyone is happy, they killed him a second time." But the will-power of the humble market-woman who had struggled against adversity all her life, reacted against the situation. They had killed him there, but he would resurrect in another place. She must go to meet him.

She examined again the contents of the linen bag in which she kept her capital; but alas! a careful exploration produced only a few copper coins—fifty *centimes* in all!—enough to buy an admission ticket in that unknown theatre in Grenelle, but there was no money left to pay the subway fare. Unwittingly she had squandered all her resources in the uproarious adventures of that great afternoon. She would have to walk to Grenelle. But it was so far . . . so terribly far!

A strange thought crossed her mind. "Suppose I beg. This is a day of universal rejoicing. People will take pity on me when they see how old and worn I am." But despite her fatigue, she immediately straightened up with a gesture of offended dignity. No! She had never begged, and it was too late to begin now.

"I must see him . . . I must see him!"

She advanced a few more steps and dropped utterly exhausted upon one of the boulevard benches. The doors of the cafés and cabarets blazed in the twilight like the openings of heated ovens. The music of the various orchestras blended in merry

discord. Couples passed and disappeared in the darkness.

"So far! . . . So far!" the old woman sighed.

Suddenly a soldier stood smiling in front of her, a soldier in white from the top of his trench helmet to his heavy shoes; curiously enough, she could see through his body; she could see the surrounding trees, the next bench and the people who passed by. He seemed to be made of glass, or thin vapor, or impalpable foam. And now he was beckoning to her to follow him! She got up to obey and the soldier stalked away.

"My limbs ache," she moaned. "I cannot follow you. It's too far to Grenelle . . . several kilometers I'll never get there."

She dropped on another bench and the transparent soldier stopped, turning toward her his gloomy visage.

"Don't look so sad," she begged. "If you knew how tired I am! . . . But your grandmother will never abandon you. . . . Albert, wait for me. I am coming, *mon petit!*"

And the woman, making a supreme effort, rose again and went on in pursuit of the phantom through the cold, dreary, interminable streets. Guided by our fond memories, we poor human beings go through the asperities of life in search of Illusion.

THE HERO

I

"And I suppose you met Monsieur Simoulin?"

Anybody who visited the historic town of X— in French Flanders was sure sooner or later to be asked that question.

The traveler might know the ancient cathedral of the city from spire to crypt; he might have visited, guide-book in hand, all the churches and convents dating from the Spanish occupation; he might have studied all the quaint façades of bourgeois houses belonging to later Flemish periods. But he was credited with knowing nothing unless he had met the director of the Library-Museum whom some people called "Monsieur Simoulin," as though no other description were necessary, while others referred to him respectfully, though still more tersely, as "our poet."

The most famous curiosity in the historic town of X— was undoubtedly "Monsieur Simoulin, our poet." On this point everyone agreed, not omitting the three newspapers of opposing political parties in the town, which could agree on nothing else.

Nevertheless, among the numerous landmarks in X— no one could point to the birthplace of "our poet."

The great Monsieur Simoulin was a Southerner, a *méridional,* from the country of olive groves and August crickets; though he had come when quite young to X—, to take charge of the library that was being established there. At X— moreover he had married and raised a family; and the good people of the town were quite willing to forget his foreign origin in view of the unquestioned glory he brought to their parish. Estimable but unlettered citizens for the most part, the notables of the town, enriched on the manufacture of beer and Flemish rolls, had noticed simply that their Museum had been filled, during Simoulin's regency, with historic objects that bore splendid testimony to the past eminence of X—; and as for "our poet," he could talk most impressively of bishops, knights, and burgomasters who had figured in the ancestry of many commonplace shopkeepers in the city.

In addition to all that, Monsieur Simoulin was a man who looked the part. "That is just what a great man should look like," everyone averred on seeing his long white beard and flashing eyes, under a head of snowy hair that had the venerableness of years and the flourish of genius. While on his feet, Monsieur Simoulin lost, to be sure, something of

his majesty. He was a trifle short in stature, and there was a suggestion of nervousness, uneasiness, in his carriage. But there, behind his desk in the Museum study, in spite of the wrinkles on his face and the dusty yellow of his complexion, he could have passed for the Lord of Abraham, of Isaac and of Jacob.

Whenever Monsieur Simoulin talked—and that was whenever there was anyone to listen—his words had the prestige of a personal intimacy with greatness. All the foremost celebrities of the last fifty years had been close friends of the wonderful man. He always mentioned Victor Hugo and Gambetta by their first names. During Gambetta's political campaigns against the Royalists, he had had undoubtedly, some connection with the Great Republican tribune. As for the author of *Les Miserables,* the truth was Monsieur Simoulin had seen him only once. He had gone with a committee of Republican students to carry a greeting to the great Hugo, while the latter was in exile at Guernesey. But such deficiencies counted little with Monsieur Simoulin's admirers. They continued to repeat, with solemn unquestioning awe, that "Victor Hugo was a dear friend of 'our poet'." From Zola, Daudet, and other more recent glories of France, Monsieur Simoulin could show letters. "My dear Simoulin." They were brief notes, with that forced

fraternal intimacy which successful men, out of homesick fondness for the days of their youth, feel called upon to write, sometimes, to boyhood acquaintances who have fallen behind in the rush toward fame. But such subtleties escaped the idolators of the great librarian. The local papers would publish one of these letters from time to time in the column devoted to historic curiosities. And the neighbors of "our poet" would say: "Monsieur Simoulin would have been one of the greatest writers of the age, had he stuck to Paris. His was, by rights, the glory that others are now enjoying. But he sacrificed himself! He preferred to live with us!"

And the people of X— did their best to reward this sacrifice. The Town Council listened to his recommendations as to voices from on high. When the city treasury was empty there was still money enough to cover any improvements in the Museum that Monsieur Simoulin desired. Under-Secretaries passing through the region always paid him a visit, and a President of the Republic, in a speech from the train during a five-minute stop at the station of X— had referred to him as one of the "distinguished men of the region." After that, he had had no difficulty in marrying off his sons to daughters of rich manufacturers in the town, who formerly had accepted only sons-in-law with money.

Monsieur Simoulin was the most famous orator

of the county. When the newspapers wanted to be sure of a crowd at some public meeting, their advertisements would carry the feature: "Monsieur Simoulin will speak." He was, in fact, master of the ringing patriotic sentence, and deft, as well, with the "ode of greeting." To announce an after-dinner fantasy by "our great poet" was to be sure that every seat at a banquet table would be occupied.

However, it was during his forenoons at the Library, that Monsieur Simoulin held virtual court. Around him crowded there all the ambitious literary aspirants of the countryside to seek advice and encouragement from the famous "master." He would welcome everyone like an old friend, though it was difficult for him to dwell long on a visitor's troubles. "As my old friend Hugo used to say——" and he would be off on anecdotes of his own experience with great men of letters.

Evenings Monsieur Simoulin devoted to his more solid and serious friends. Admiration for his learning had finally brought a number of retired merchants and officials in X— to give up collecting saddles or trading horses and devote themselves to the genealogy and archaeology of the locality.

The favorite pupil of Monsieur Simoulin, in these latter gatherings, was the retired "Commandant" Pierrefonds, a veteran of campaigns in Africa and China, and one of the formidable personages in

X—. Pierrefonds was a man of few words but emphatic. He had preserved, from army days, the habit of intolerance toward any trifling with his dignity. Famous for his bad temper, which he vented in menacing gestures and words that snarled from under a stiff reddish-gray mustache, "Commandant Pierrefonds, Retired," was an object of awe to everyone—everyone except Monsieur Simoulin, who ventured even to jest, occasionally, with the terrible soldier.

The admiration that Commandant Pierrefonds paid to Monsieur Simoulin amounted almost to worship. The Commandant, who was a bachelor, had lived, since his withdrawal from active service on account of ill-health, in a modest house on the outskirts of the town. His only companions there were an aged housekeeper and a collection of rare coins. And in fact, now that all hope of military renown had vanished, it was to the science of numismatics that the soldier was devoting his declining years. That was why no human greatness seemed to him comparable with that of the antiquarian Simoulin. Pierrefond's sole remaining aspiration was to be the greatest of that great man's pupils, the first of the "Simoulin school." He followed the "master" everywhere, and those who envied him this intimacy, finished by dubbing him "the poet's bull-dog."

But the "bull-dog" differed from other dogs in that he recognized some defects in the human being he had chosen to call God. Pierrefonds, with a soldier's regard for the point of honor, considered falsehood as the direst of all sins. He could not remember having told a lie once in his whole lifetime; and he could imagine himself dying rather than consenting to depart one iota from the truth. Whereas the "master" . . .!

To be quite just, Pierrefonds did not know exactly what to think of Monsieur Simoulin. And the same hesitation was felt by the librarian's pupils, his sons, his wife, and in fact, all who knew him at all well!

Was "our poet," after all, something of—well, something of an embroiderer?

Of course not! Monsieur Simoulin was not a liar. The liar lies with an end in view. He lies either to gain a point himself or to checkmate someone else. In this sense, Monsieur Simoulin never lied.

Monsieur Simoulin, in the last analysis, simply did not know the meaning of the word "truth." He was in the habit of avoiding Truth whenever he chanced to meet the lady. If he were taken by the hand and introduced to her, he would lower his eyes or look the other way. Truth, at any rate, he always saw somewhat differently from anybody else.

Things had to be, not as they were, but as he chose to have them; and when he saw anything happen and then told about it, he made up a story that sounded well, whether it corresponded to reality or not.

Monsieur Simoulin's lies, if lies such may be called, took the form invariably of exaggeration or understatement. At one moment his home town of X— would be a greater city than New York or London. Then again it would be the most miserable hole this side of Squeedunk. So people were either gods or demons. There was no middle ground anywhere, whether he was speaking of people or of things. To put the situation as one of his pupils, a former judge, with a bent toward philosophical studies, put it: "The master has the defect of many great men—he has 'a lunatic in the house'."

"Yes, sir! A lunatic in the house!"; and the judge would look up expectantly to see if any of his hearers had caught the allusion. For that was what the philosopher Malebranche had called the human imagination.

The lunatic—a feminine lunatic, it was, in the French of Malebranche—the lunatic that inhabited Monsieur Simoulin's "upper story" was not always awake. At times "our poet" would talk as reasonably and accurately as a baker in X— would weigh his rolls. At other times the lunatic would be run-

ning amuck in the wildest fashion. The illustrious librarian would seem to be living in a world apart, seeing things that nobody else could see and saying things that would have been called whoppers in the mouth of anybody but a recognized genius.

Commandant Pierrefonds had enough "literature" in his training to appreciate the attenuations that might be pleaded in behalf of his master's shortcomings towards the truth. "Just read Balzac," he would say. "Do you suppose one of those stories he tells was true? Not a bit of it! Lies, all lies! Well, that's the way with the 'master.' Geniuses are all like that!"

And who knows, after all, that it was not the lunatic in Monsieur Semoulin's upper story that had enabled him so easily to conquer the affections of that sleepy old town in French Flanders which, in its drowsy matter-of-factness, liked a touch of the imagination it found in this gentleman from the country of Tartarin.

II

When the Great War broke out, Monsieur Simoulin's glory reached its apogee. That historic August was the busiest time "our poet" had seen in his long sedentary life. He went down to the sta-

tion to bid every train of troops good-bye. Every evening he would walk up to the band-stand in X— and appear in the front line of the citizens crowding round to sing the "Marseillaise." At the sight of his flourish of white wavy hair, the multitude would interrupt its song. "Speech! Speech! Monsieur Simoulin is here! A speech from the master!" "Our poet" would mount the dais of the conductor to the applause of the people and amid the waving of flags; and soon women and men would be sobbing in pathos or cheering with intoxication, according as the masterly dispenser of patriotic thrills had chosen.

At times, Monsieur Simoulin would stand silently with arms folded like a Napoleon surveying a field of victory. At others he would rant and rave like a Danton inveighing against the enemies of the country. The great heroes of France passed by in review in the orator's imaginative picturing, and with each one of them Monsieur seemed to identify himself. Swelling with the pride of greatness, he would prophesy victory with the assurance of the strategist or the conviction of the saint. No one could surpass him in describing the horror to which Belgium and France were being subjected by the unjust aggression of the Germans.

So things went on for two or three weeks. And even then Monsieur Simoulin did not lose courage.

"This talk of German victories is only an invention of the enemy to deceive themselves. Tomorrow the truth will bring them to their senses."

But the truth on the morrow brought the Germans themselves. They were approaching the Flemish town of X—. Many of the townspeople had long before taken to flight, and more than one friend had suggested to "our poet" the wisdom of going on to Paris where the French government needed the services of all the nation's most brilliant men.

"Let the enemy come on," Monsieur Simoulin had thundered from the dais on the band-stand. "They will find me waiting for them here."

His sons had all enlisted, and Madame Simoulin had gone with her daughters-in-law to a town in southern France. The poet was all alone, and ready for any act of heroism.

"And they'll find me here too," Commandant Pierrefonds had echoed.

Pierrefonds had felt all his warlike past come back upon him with the outbreak of hostilities. Declared ineligible for active service on account of failing health, he had, nevertheless, been appointed to a perfunctory position in the military administration of X—.

"Here I shall stay," he added, "till the Ministry orders me to beat a retreat."

However, with the army of a nation hurtling

back upon the Marne, the Minister of War did not find time to order Pierrefonds from his advanced post. In technical command of some hundred aged men, recruited for police duty from the Old Men's Home in X—, Pierrefonds witnessed the arrival of the first German Uhlans in the town. He was at home, at the moment of their entry. And his old housekeeper had to kneel at his feet and beg him not to use the rusty revolver which he had caught up to fire upon the invaders. "If you shoot, we shall all be executed as snipers," the weeping lady had pleaded. Pierrefonds, besides, thought of a remark of the "master": "Pierrefonds, when the Boches get here—if they ever get here—remember! We must be great and haughty in misfortune! The heroism of sacrifice is nobler than the heroism of victory!"

The illustrious Monsieur Simoulin had plenty of opportunity to know what the heroism of sacrifice implied. On the occupation of X— he dressed himself up in his best afternoon clothes and set out to interview the German general, intending to deliver, in his most effective oratorical style, a ringing protest against the invasion of the country and against reported German atrocities. He got no further, however, for a young lieutenant told him to go home and be quiet, unless he wanted to be shot. No one in the German camp seemed in the least to appreciate

the "master's" eminence in the region; and the card which he presented made no impression upon the sentries at all. Meanwhile, his admiring friends in X— had deserted him. The younger men had all enlisted. Most of the older ones had fled. The others who were left obeyed German instructions and kept carefully indoors.

"Our poet" came to know all the torments of hunger and inaction; but the worst torture came from the loss of his local prestige. "The lunatic in the house" disported herself to no avail. Whenever Monsieur Simoulin would meet a number of his miserable comrades in servitude, he would try to reassure them: "It will soon be over. I have just received excellent news, direct from Joffre. Our army will be back here in a few days." But that recourse soon failed him. His cheering "embroideries" soon lost their color even in his own eyes; and eventually the "lunatic in the house" fell back into a deep sleep that resembled death. Even Monsieur Simoulin tired of hearing himself talk.

Finally came the order of deportation. The Germans had decided to impose a new form of discipline upon the conquered regions. Old men, women, and children were commanded to make ready for a march into the interior of Germany, where they would be set to work harvesting the crops of the Vaterland.

By this time, the military governors had learned

something of Monsieur Simoulin's position in the community of X—; and that was why, as an added offense to the city, the librarian and his friend, Pierrefonds, were placed in the front line of the procession of deportees.

"Commandant," the poet observed once more, "remember what I told you. The heroism of sacrifice is nobler than . . ."

But the expression on the old soldier's face was a terrifying one. His eyes were bloodshot and the contractions of rage that played about his mouth gave strange contortions to his reddish gray mustache. For the first time he ignored his "master's" presence. For the first time, he repented of not having fled the city. Then, at least, he might have gotten to the front and died like a man of action. But for Jacques Pierrefonds, Commandant retired, to be driven along in a chain gang like a convict or a negro slave! Wrath of God!

Pierrefonds had not as yet seen a German from near at hand. His housekeeper had held him virtually locked up at home, for fear that once outside he would attack some one of the invaders and bring misfortune upon the house and upon the town. Now plenty of Germans were within speaking distance. A squad of infantry was on guard along the line of disconsolate exiles. An officer on horseback was in charge of the preparations for the march. The offi-

cer, a man of pale haggard features, on which Monsieur Simoulin thought he could read an expression of weariness and disgust, perhaps the better to conceal his shame at the vile duty imposed upon him, sat squarely in the saddle with an exaggerated stiffness of pose.

Upon this officer Pierrefonds fixed his bloodthirsty gaze.

"Attention . . . ! Marche!"

The officer had spurred his horse to one side, giving the order for the procession to advance.

Pierrefonds could not restrain his rage. As he came up abreast of the officer, he stopped. In his own heart he was determined to die, rather than take a single step forward.

"Down with the Kaiser! Death to the invader!" he shouted, with a voice that echoed hoarsely in the square.

The officer winced under the visor of his helmet. Then he stood with a gesture of surprise and anger. Finally he mastered himself, and surveyed the prisoner with a cold, but hesitant gaze.

Pierrefonds did not lower his eyes, but faced the German defiantly.

The officer shrugged his shoulders, and muttering, with affected indifference, the word "Suicide!" he looked in another direction.

As for the soldiers of the guard, they seemed not

to notice at all, as though nothing could reach their ears till it had passed through those of their chieftain.

Pierrefonds was still more enraged at his failure to produce any impression on his captors.

"Down with the . . ."

He was about to repeat his insulting cry, when a hand closed over his mouth and someone began to pull him by the arm.

"For heaven's sake, Pierrefonds, what are you thinking of? Do you want them to shoot us all?"

It was Monsieur Simoulin. The "master" was looking up into his face with an expression of terrified appeal that quite diverted the Commandant's thoughts from the Germans.

"Inconscionable idiot you are, Pierrefonds!" Monsieur Simoulin went on. "You might have been the death of every mother's son among us. A child would know better than that! The idea of a man of your age . . . !"

And it was several days before Monsieur Simoulin caught breath in reproaching the Captain for his absurd bravado.

"Coolness, brains, that's what we need. And there you were braying out like a jackass! 'Down with the Kaiser! Death to the Invader!' Do you think we want to get shot just on your account?"

III

When the Great War was over at last, the historic town of X— in French Flanders gradually resumed its former serenity. One by one the people who had fled Von Buelow's advance returned, and those who had remained to live through four years or more of foreign occupation had endless narratives to tell of their experiences.

From Germany also gradually trickled back small groups of exiles who had been deported to the interior of the enemy country. The number of such sufferers had appreciably diminished. Hundreds of them never reappeared. They remained away off there sleeping their eternal sleep in soil that must have been hateful to their weary bodies.

"And Monsieur Simoulin? Has Monsieur Simoulin survived the torture?"

Yes, Monsieur Simoulin proved to be alive and well. Not only that. Though his captors had at first treated him like anybody else, there is a principle in life that the really brilliant light will shine even from under a bushel. It chanced that a German professor, who had once written a doctor's dissertation on the "History, Evolution, and Present Dissemination of the Flemish Breakfast Roll, in its relation to Sociological, Economic, and Political

Conditions in the town of X—" (in presentation of which he had had reference to the "profound erudition and considerate courtesy of my learned friend, Monsieur Simoulin, director of the National Library Museum") noticed "our poet's" name among the list of prisoners. The professor had secured Monsieur Simoulin's transfer to the university town, and on the librarian's recommendation Commandant Pierrefonds, on the basis of his numismatic avocation, shared in the privilege. Four years had passed for the pair, and wearily enough to be sure, but endurably. And now Monsieur Simoulin and his "bull-dog" were coming home.

The town council voted a public holiday to welcome "our poet" on his return from captivity. Why not, in fact? Had not this distinguished citizen added to the laurels of literature the halo of heroism? When others had fled before the invader he had stood courageously at his post, and the glory encircling his venerable head was of such radiance that the ferocious enemy himself had been moved to respect, according him privileges denied to his other comrades in exile.

The roof threatened to leap off the station at X— when Monsieur Simoulin stepped down from the train. An immense burst of applause greeted his arrival. Women dressed in black forgot their personal sorrows in the public joy of the great man's return. "But how he has aged!" The flourish, in-

deed, may have departed from Monsieur Simoulin's wavy white hair. But otherwise there was little change in him. He had the old excitable enthusiasm, the old nervousness, the old lyric eloquence which caused the town to thrill as under a first balmy zephyr of the Spring of Peace.

A yard or two behind Monsieur Simoulin came, as usual, his "bull-dog," the Commandant Pierrefonds, retired. The soldier's features had the same cast of concentrated sourness as before. One had to look very closely to detect an expression of deeper melancholy in his eyes. The Germans had confiscated his collection of ancient coins. Nothing but the housekeeper was left to cheer his solitary bachelor's home.

"What could a fellow do after such a loss? You can't start a new collection at my age!" By force of habit, more than anything else, he dogged along in "our poet's" footsteps. The crowd was escorting Monsieur Simoulin to the balcony of the Hotel de Ville, and nobody paid any attention to the Commandant Pierrefonds.

Monsieur Simoulin spoke that day in his very best manner. Years will pass before the memory of his "oration on the occasion of return from exile" vanishes from the historic town of X—. What tears! What cheers! The "poet" described the martyrdom of the city, the sufferings of its sons and daughters, the agony of those who had died

far away on hostile ground. But eventually he came to touch, with his well-known modesty and reserve, on his own personal part in the epic of X—.

"Honor me not," he protested disparagingly. "What have I done? My duty perhaps as you all, we all, have done. Haughty and unconcerned we faced the invader, heroes conscious that the heroism of sacrifice is nobler, aye, a thousand times nobler, than the heroism of victory . . ."

Here he was compelled to pause, while a thunder of cheers swept over the crowded square.

"But may I, in closing, just relate one incident which will serve you as evidence of the heights that human heroism can attain when, strong in the conviction of a just cause, it fears neither torment nor death. I should refrain from mentioning this incident, were I alone the chief actor in it. But a man, now standing near me, had his glorious part therein; and it would be a crying shame to deprive him of that portion of the glory which belongs to him."

Monsieur Simoulin went on to describe the departure of the deportees from X—. "I and the Commandant Pierrefonds, retired, were in the front line. We had decided to die rather than endure the shame of such treatment. So, as we passed in front of the German tyrant, we embraced each other, and then facing our captors we shouted in his face: 'Down with the Kaiser. Death to the Invader!' "

Commandant Pierrefonds started with surprise

and then he flushed in indignation. His reddish gray mustache began to writhe about his lips as though it were bending under the pressure of an avalanche of pent-up curses.

But the speaker had given way to the suggestion of his own words. Monsieur Simoulin had embraced the Commandant, scowlingly affronting the imaginary foe, and picturing on his face the heroic resignation of a man offering himself to the executioner. Besides, not even the Commandant's oaths would have been audible in the roar of appreciation that ascended from the multitude.

The "lunatic" in the librarian's house had come to life again, and was up to her old tricks. Monsieur Simoulin was again embroidering.

The Commandant swept the embracing arms aside. He bent his head in shame. For the first time in his life he was allowing a lie to go unchallenged. Nevertheless, there was a touch of pleasure in his disappointment. Never before had even half a public ovation fallen to his lot.

IV

And two more years went by.

By that time the heroic act of Monsieur Simoulin had produced an echo as far away as Paris. His famous cry in the face of the German army had

become national property. As for the city of X—, "our poet" had now been re-christened "our hero." Whenever Monsieur Simoulin appeared before a crowd, there would rise: "Down with the Kaiser! Death to the Invader!" The children would leave school with that cheer upon their lips, and in passing the white-haired old man, they would take off their hats as though they were saluting the flag of the Republic.

Meanwhile Commandant Pierrefonds was living in a dream. He was beginning to wonder whether the "lunatic" were not living now in his own house, so absurd and impossible did the situation seem. However, the "master" had really mentioned him in the famous speech, and a part of the applause had risen to the Commandant Pierrefonds. And he was proud as he thought of that. As for the "poet's" embroidery, that was only another case, the Commandant reflected, of Monsieur Simoulin's inability to remember things as they were.

But people seemed to have forgotten the poor soldier in spite of everything. The picture of Commandant Pierrefonds embraced by Monsieur Simoulin was becoming dim in the public mind; for masses do not like divided glory. They want a single, an individual hero, someone they can isolate and stage. That was why Pierrefonds was never mentioned in connection with Monsieur Simoulin's

heroic cry. And eventually Monsieur Simoulin himself forgot that detail of the embrace. The "lunatic in the house" diverted his attention to his own heroic pose as he raised his right hand in the face of the German officer, and delivered the courageous insulting words. In that pose Monsieur Simoulin could see himself eternalized in bronze in the square of X—, as future generations would return in grateful remembrance to the episode. Meanwhile, the librarian was elaborating the story with more and more numerous details. No longer was it relegated to the end of his orations. It had grown to the full proportions of an hour's speech.

Pierrefonds began to hate everything about him, and even seriously to doubt his own sanity. Could Simoulin actually have raised that cry? "No, it was surely I who said: 'Down with the Kaiser. Death to the Invader!' But yet—but yet . . . !" However, he would end always by recovering faith in himself, and he found solace in a crushing contempt for everyone in town. "Why go to that soiree?" he would say. "To hear people talk of Simoulin and his historic cry? Bosh!"

And he broke off relations with the "master." He could not stand the innocent conviction with which, in the presence of him, the Commandant Pierrefonds in person, Simoulin would relate that astounding pack of lies. Furthermore, the Germans had stolen

all the Commandant's collection, and ancient coins had lost their charm for him. The Commandant's work in life was now to yawn between the chapters of dull books, to work an occasional hour in his little garden, and make comparisons between the traces of old age in his housekeeper and the ravages of time upon himself.

One day, however, his retirement was rudely disturbed. A banquet was being organized in town to honor "our poet," "our hero." Monsieur Simoulin was to receive a decoration for bravery from the Government. "You must come! The 'master' wants you. He is getting old, and you ought to please him just this once. There will be Senators and Deputies from Paris. The Minister of Education has promised to make a speech!"

Commandant Pierrefonds would be d——d if he would go! But the housekeeper intervened. "Old friends of yours—why not see them? Besides, a bit of a carousal . . . that would do you good."

Finally he consented. After all, it might be the last public testimonial to his old "master." And Monsieur Simoulin wanted to see him. Perhaps . . . perhaps!

And, in fact, on the night of the banquet, Monsieur Simoulin literally rushed upon Commandant Pierrefonds.

"Pierrefonds! . . . Pierrefonds! My dear old friend! My comrade in slavery!"

And he introduced the soldier to the Minister and to all the dignitaries who had come on from Paris. "A hero, gentlemen! A real soldier! A true patriot!"

Pierrefonds grunted with a show of pleasure, and his mustache where the gray was now but lightly tinged with red, bristled into something like a smile. Simoulin, at bottom was a good soul, willing to share his glory with the humble. Doubtless their recent estrangement had been due to envious people eager to break up a friendship so delightful!

During the banquet Simoulin did not lose sight of Commandant Pierrefond. Of course, the chair at the "poet's" right was filled by the Minister, and at his left sat another important personage from Paris. Pierrefonds, however, found a place within reach of the "master's" eyes and voice. He was always introduced into the conversation and once Monsieur Simoulin raised his glass in the direction of his old friend: "To the health of my heroic comrade in suffering!"

"Yes, a good fellow after all. The 'master' did not know the meaning of injustice. How was it possible to be angry with such a man?"

In the course of the evening a dozen toasts were drunk with speeches by the notables from Paris. It was now the "poet's" turn to deliver his oration in thanks for the great honor.

And a graceful speech it was. Monsieur Simoulin

had a turgid style perhaps. But he always managed to connect what he said with a central theme. This time it was "civic heroism and military valor," and needless to say, from the very first words of the orator, military valor came out second best in the argument.

That was what made Commandant Pierrefonds begin to worry. Moreover he could see the "master's" eyes. They were shining with the strange brilliancy which they used to take on when the "lunatic" was becoming most unruly in the "poet's" house. He could see that Monsieur Simoulin's soul was not in its proper place. It was out flitting around in a fantastic world, wool-gathering, and without a doubt it would soon come home and deposit on that banquet table a pile of imaginings which the guests would carry away for truth. What would the "poet" say next?

"You see before you, my friends, my comrade in captivity, a true hero, a soldier as resplendent with medals as his body is glorious with wounds, a man who worked untold miracles of valor in the wars for our vast colonial empire. Now there you have military valor at its undisputed heights. Whereas I—I am nothing but a poor poet, with prospect at the most, of demonstrating at certain moments my portion of civic heroism.

"You recall the scene yourselves, for the papers

and the writings of historians have engraved the picture on your minds with indelible outlines, endowing me with an eternity I do not deserve. We were about to start on the deadly march into exile. The cry I uttered was something superior to my will, for my will would have counselled prudence. But, as you see, when civic heroism is awakened in a man it knows no danger. I shouted: 'Down with the Kaiser! Death to the Invader!' And this man, this warrior, the hero of a hundred battles, perhaps because he had a clearer vision of reality than I, seized my hands beseechingly: 'For Heaven's sake, master, what are you thinking of? Do you want to get us all shot? Please, master, be calm?' My dear comrade here cannot have forgotten his emotions at that moment. As a soldier of unquestioned heroism, he will doubtless admit, with no sign of shame, that at that instant, and perhaps for the first time in his whole life, he knew what fear was like."

The Commandant Pierrefonds was unable to say a word. A round of handclapping broke in upon the "poet's" peroration. And as Monsieur Simoulin sat down the guests all crowded in his direction to shake his hand in sincere admiration for his naive straightforward eloquence. The speaker sat there fanning himself, perspiring with emotion and fatigue.

Pierrefonds hestitated a moment.

Finally he strode toward the door. In the banquet hall, people were so much engaged with Monsieur Simoulin that no one noticed the Commandant's withdrawal. No one saw his violent gestures, nor heard the words of indignation that forced their way out from under his gray mustache.

After that evening Pierrefonds was never seen again in the historic town of X— in French Flanders.

According to some people, he took to his bed and never left. Others think he moved out of the city, unable to tolerate the presence of the "poet" who had a "lunatic in his house."

THE WIDOW'S LOAN

I

When Rosalindo Ovejero announced that he was going into town to attend the festival in honor of Our Lord of the Miracles, the famous Christ of Salta, all the inhabitants of his little valley, shut in between two spurs of the Andes, went to his house to entrust all sorts of pious errands to him.

Years before, when business was good and trade between Salta and the saltpeter mines of Chile and Southern Bolivia was active, there had always been plenty of muleteers rich enough and patriotic enough to pay the way of all their neighbors to the festival.

In those days the whole valley, you might say, used to go down to Salta—a veritable army of men and women on horseback escorting a mule in brilliant trappings laden with an image of the infant Jesus. Those in charge of the excursions took careful pains to see that the splendor of the valley patron's adornments should far surpass anything that saints from other places could boast of.

The journey from the valley into town took never more than two days. The return trip, on the other

hand, often lasted three weeks. On their way back the pilgrims stopped at all the villages along the road to parade their patron in his glory. At all such places dancing would begin at noon and last till midnight.

Not infrequently these return journeys, where the resting periods were much longer than the marches, were disturbed by quarrels and bloodshed; but no one was shocked on that account. A crowd of men inured to the hardships of the mountain trails, and armed to the teeth every one of them, could hardly be expected to live together week in, week out, drinking and dancing with women, without knives being drawn occasionally!

This, however, was in the old days.

Now there were no rich drivers left to furnish the hundred doubloons or more required for an old-fashioned pilgrimage with the infant Jesus. The most successful trailsmen had moved away from the valley. Only a few of the poorer sort were still hanging on doing odd jobs as expressmen for merchants in Salta who had dealings with El Paposo in Chile, or with Tarija in Bolivia. Rosalindo Ovejero was the only one who still kept up the old traditions; and Rosalindo—well, he never missed the trip into town to escort Our Lord of the Miracles on the latter's solemn procession about the city streets.

The moment Rosalindo had fixed the time for his

departure, the old adobe ranch house, which he had inherited from his father and his grandfather, began to fill with visitors. Women would come and tell him down to the last detail all the diseases which the miraculous image had cured for them. "A promise to visit the Christ of Salta—and a plaster—and I was well again!" They couldn't make the trip this year, but wouldn't Rosalindo speak for them?

Every such request for an errand was emphasized with a peso note.

"Take this, brother, and buy the biggest candle you can find. Remember, your poor old mother was a great friend of mine."

Then there would be men, also—poor mule drivers of the Chilean trail, with faces wrinkled and tanned by the icy blasts of the uplands.

"Here you are, Rosalindo. A peso for a candle! Get a big one for the procession of Our Lord. He knows, and I know what it's all for!"

Boundless the faith of everyone in this Christ of the Miracles, who had been living in their country since the days of the first Conquistadores! Across the ocean he had come in a floating box, without sails and without oars. He had drifted ashore in a harbor of Peru. Finally he had chosen Salta as his place of residence, and since that time the miracles he had performed numbered thousands and thousands!

But the simple Indians of the Cordillera could never allow this omnipotent divinity imported by the whites to reign alone. Other minor gods had sprung up around him. People all had great affection for the Christ of Salta; but the power they were really afraid of was the Widow of the Lantern!

The Widow of the Lantern was a witch who sometimes, when mule drivers got lost along the mountain trails, appeared at night before them with a lantern in her hand. The man who met her must pack his kit at once for a trip to the other world. He was bound to die before the advent of a new year.

Rosalindo Ovejero counted over the errands entrusted to him before he left his house. Fourteen there were in all. Fourteen candles to be carried in the procession!

"Well," he thought, "using all my fingers I can handle eight—four in each hand. What shall I do with the other six?" But that concern did not trouble him especially. He could find some fellow around the saloons in Salta who would carry them for the price of a drink! And gaily he set out upon his journey, mounted on a nag that for the moment was his entire fortune.

Rosalindo reached Salta the day of the procession. It was September, the beginning of springtime in

the southern hemisphere. The streets were drenched with the perfume of flowers from the old gardens. The bells were ringing frantically from the steeples of all the churches and convents. A regiment with mounted cannon had been sent on from Buenos Aires as the government's tribute to Our Lord of the Miracles. Processions of friars of the different orders were everywhere visible about the streets and in the ancient Plaza de Armas.

Ovejero appeared punctually at the church. First the different images from the country towns went by with their escorts of rustic faithful. Some of these had come leagues and leagues down from the mountains. The men were walking along beside their saint, bareheaded, their spurs clattering on the pavements, their hats held in front of them in both their hands. With them were their children, gay with red and black ponchos; and their wives also, plump, shiny-skinned halfbreeds, dressed in flaming colors, green, pink or scarlet.

The young ladies of Salta, in wide-brimmed hats and dressed in white, soft blues, strawberry-reds and pinks—for this was the annual show for the new spring styles—walked two by two, under banners and standards borne by friars. Few traces of ascetic compunction featured this festival of spring-time. The young ladies lifted their heads boldly to

acknowledge greetings from balconies and windows, or smiled discreetly at glances from the young men gathered on the street corners.

Only in the copper-colored, red-skinned throngs that lined the sidewalks could any deep, religious emotion be discerned. These simple souls were deeply affected by the clouds of incense rising from the censers; by the uniforms of the soldiers, the display of bayonets and polished steel, and finally the wonder-working Lord himself, nailed there on the cross, bleeding, and quite naked save for a loincloth of velvet.

At the end of the procession came the most interesting group, those who had been healed by their devotion to the Christ and were eager to bear public witness to their gratitude. There were young girls, tall, slender, with ruddy cheeks and almond eyes, and wearing black mourning shawls over their swelling skirts of flaming colors; then old women with wrinkled, time-stained faces, much as the Widow of the Lantern must have been—and how they wept and wailed at sight of the bleeding body of Our Lord; and *gauchos* also, to whom fortune had been unkind —bearded, hairy fellows, with features tanned by the sun and bitten by the frost and snow, with frayed ponchos and shoes very much the worse for wear, but inevitably with spurs—the symbol of dignity as a gentleman of the horse!

The marchers were all careful of the tiny flames flickering above their closed fists. Some of the worshipers had as many as four candles lighted in each hand. They also were fulfilling vows of absent devotees. Rosalindo, for his part, had found a friend to walk beside him and carry the six candles he could not manage himself. Don't imagine that Ovejero thought of keeping any of those pesos for himself! To be sure he had bought candles somewhat smaller than his neighbors had expected; but that was only fair in view of the expenses he would have in the revelry that was to follow the procession.

When the march was over, Rosalindo extinguished his fourteen tapers and figured up just how much he could get for the unused ends. Then in company with his helper he began to make the rounds of the different places of amusement.

Rosalindo danced every round, watering each intermission with cup after cup of the biting *aguardiente* from Tucuman. About midnight he turned up in a house where some tall strapping cowboys from Chaco—huge fellows with hooked noses and keen, sharp features, and a courtly manner that suggested the Arab horsemen of the legends—were the guests of honor. A harp was furnishing the music there, a delicate, melancholy, tinkling music such as comes from an old-fashioned music box. The spurs of the *gauchos* were clattering on the

floor as they whirled round and round. The women, halfbreed Indians, to escape the pursuit of their partners, were tripping gaily back and forth, their wrappers swelling out behind them from the rapid movement of the dance. In their hands they were waving the silk handkerchiefs without which it is impossible to do a good, an authentic Chileanette.

Somehow, the soft, sentimental rippling of the harp grated on Rosalindo's nerves, soured the drink he had been pouring into his body; and his irritation took the form of a sudden and implacable hatred against anybody low-down enough to have been born in Chaco.

What were those fellows doing in Salta, anyhow? Why didn't they stay where they belonged? What did they mean—coming down to the festival of Our Lord of the Miracles and making up to the prettiest girls in Salta? He knew very well, of course, that those women would dance with anyone, that they were as much strangers to the region as the visiting *gauchos* themselves. But when you are looking for a quarrel any pretext will do.

It was not long before Rosalindo, loyally supported by his comrade, had his knife out and was bravely facing the Chaco *gauchos,* who had also produced their weapons. A man fell to the floor. The women screamed. The "orchestra" gathered up his instrument under his arm and made for the

door, the harp bumping against all the projections, first along the hall and then along the street. A crowd gathered outside. At last the police came, a whole squad of them.

Rosalindo, on making his escape, agreed to meet his friend as soon as they should both have slept off their wine, at a point on the outskirts of the city.

"I believe you got him, brother," the man said when they came together. And since he had some experience in such matters, he advised Rosalindo to take the road for Chile at once, unless he preferred to spend a long vacation in the penitentiary at Salta. All the dancing girls, as well as the *gauchos* present, could swear that they had seen Rosalindo give the fatal thrust. Besides, he had dropped his knife on the floor of the dance hall in his hurry to get away.

Of course the flight to Chile was not an easy one. You had to cross the Devil's Gorge, following a rough trail that led over the Andes to the harbor of El Paposo. Many Chileans fled to Salta by that route when they got into trouble in their own country. Why couldn't Rosalindo do as well going the other way?

"You have got to clear out, brother," the man again advised, "and I wouldn't take the El Paposo trail, after all. Ten to one they will be waiting for you on the frontier at Copiapo. They've seized your horse, so you've got to go on foot. Now I

propose the other trail. It will take you a long time, but you have a chance to make your living part of the distance along the road; and besides, when you get to Chile you'll run right into the saltpeter district, where there is plenty of work and pay is way up high."

Rosalindo knew the trail the man was thinking of. It was called in all that region El Camino del Despoblado—the Jailbird's Highway. It crossed the Puna de Atacama, a bleak desert where men and animals often died, sometimes of thirst, sometimes of cold, and then again ground to pieces against the rocks by the mountain gales.

Ovejero looked down at his spurs. How hard it was to lose those insignia of a cowboy, become an ordinary piker! However, he stooped and took them off.

"If you have good luck," his friend continued, "you will make Cobija Harbor, or the Antofagasta mines, in from three weeks to a month. I know fellows who have done the trip in that time."

And with the sudden burst of feeling that misfortune often inspires in the hard men of the wilds, he said, "Here, comrade, take this," and he passed over his knife and the few coins that he managed to find in different hiding places in his clothing.

So Rosalindo Ovejero turned his back on Salta and set out along the dread "highway" to the west.

II

He knew the road, though he had never been over it. Every real mountaineer seems to have a feeling, a sort of intuition, for the trails of the Andes, where men and horses are so many flies crawling up the perpendicular faces of mountains that are so high they almost obliterate the sky.

All his life long Rosalindo had heard tales of danger in the Andes and the terrors that beset the wayfarer on the desolate plateau of Atacama. Once, in fact, when he was quite a boy he had gone as helper to some drivers, leading mules along the precipices in the bad places to be sure they would not fall off. He remembered that on those journeys, which lasted months and months, he had been afraid neither of man nor of beast. So now, if a vagabond came along and tried to rob him, didn't he have his knife? And that trusted friend would do as well for the puma of the desert uplands, fierce and hungry though that wildcat always is.

No, he was not afraid of men or of animals. What he feared most was that silent spectacle of wild nature, filled with the monstrous powers of solitude, which his ancestors, going to and fro, had looked upon as gods. Ovejero, besides, was a religious soul, easily responsive to superstitious dreads.

He believed in the Christ of Salta, but then there

were the ancient, the native gods, as all the trailmen knew. Our Lord of the Miracles doubtless controlled the powers known to white men; but none the less, was not Pacha-Mama as much the mistress of the Cordillera and its dependent valleys as she had ever been in the centuries before the Spaniards came?

Pacha-Mama is a kindly, beneficent goddess, who is present everywhere and knows everything, so that a fellow cannot conceal a word or a thought from her. She is Mother Earth herself; and any trailman with a spark of God-fearing decency in him lets a drop of water fall on the ground every time he drinks, so that the good old lady may quench her thirst. And when he starts chewing coca, doesn't he kick up a piece of turf with his shoes and bury a leaf so that she may share his pleasure? Give Pacha-Mama plenty to eat and drink, and she will do no harm to you or to your children!

Rosalindo knew that Pacha-Mama didn't live alone. She had a husband, Tata-Coquena, a good-natured fellow also, though a trifle henpecked, something like the king consort in the countries where a woman may wear the crown.

Pacha-Mama and Tata-Conquena in their lifetime had been drivers along the trails. What other profession would anyone choose if he were rich enough to be able to choose? When the two gods

went across the mountains, they drove great herds of llamas, as big as elephants, along with them, and the boxes in their packs were filled with coca—a substance more precious to muleteers of the Andes than gold itself. Nothing that the country produces can compare with these dry, refreshing leaves, so rich in the magical cocaine.

As Rosalindo reached the trail to the hills, Pacha-Mama and the Christ of Salta were both present in his mind. His mixture of Indian and Spanish blood justified him in expecting help from both these divinities. If one of them failed, the other one would come to the rescue, just to spite the rival god.

The most solitary regions of the Cordillera that he had ever known seemed like paradise itself in comparison with the desert he was now traversing. Only a stunted vegetation could cling here and there to the shelter of some rock. Occasionally he would pass a pile of slag around some exhausted mine, or the ruin of an ancient village with its church—traces of the old Spanish settlers who had penetrated those uninhabitable regions in search of the precious gold.

The solitude became more and more desolate, more and more terrifying, as Rosalindo advanced. Everything was dry, parched, forbidding. Save for the snow-laden cyclones that swept the plateau in the winter months and buried every traveler they

caught, there was never any water there. The mineral riches of the soil gave the mountains fantastic colors. Here was a peak of brilliant green, there a chain of red, and there a ridge of orange. At the bottom of a basin he would see a thick, white crust where a lake of borax had petrified. Days and days went by without his seeing a real tree. From time to time he would come to a sheltered gully with cactus plants, tall and stiff as columns.

In the first days, Rosalindo had met an occasional herder keeping flocks of goats alive, in some miraculous way, on that sterile plain. After that he met no one. Absolute solitude surrounded him—the silence of a land of death, a monstrous depth of nothingness, an absence of all life, a vacuum that seemed to open before him as he stepped forward and close behind him when he had passed.

One by one he identified all the landmarks that the men who had been over the trail and the shepherds whom he had met along the border of the desert had described to him.

None of these people on receiving him into their cabins had questioned him about his business. They understood that he had "reasons" for coming that way; and since things can happen to almost any man of courage, they merely gave him advice as to the route he should follow—and a side of goat meat, usually, to keep him from starving on the road.

At last Rosalindo's food gave out, but he did not lose heart on that account. He had a pouch hanging from his belt, and as long as that was there he need not fear. A leaf of the marvelous coca from time to time filled his muscles with energy and his soul with joy. Every evening he would seek shelter in the lee of a rock, or in one of the ruined buildings that he found occasionally along the trail; and every morning at dawn he would set out on his way again, going from one landmark to the next, carefully studying the trail so as not to lose his way in that monotonous desert.

What he most feared was the chance of one of those terrible glacial winds that sweep the Puna. On that lofty plateau the blast of the hurricane is fully as destructive as the snow itself. But so long as the sky continued clear Rosalindo felt himself quite safe.

To be sure, any ordinary person, on going higher and higher, would find it harder and harder to breathe, for the Andean altitudes are a great torment to the person unused to them. But Ovejero was a true mountaineer. He was not subject to what was called "Puna-sickness." At ten thousand feet above the sea he breathed as easily as on the plains.

"I must be getting near the Widow's Tomb," he said to himself one morning, judging, from signs along the trail, that he was reaching the end of the

up grade. "A couple of days more and I will begin to go down hill."

Rosalindo, like all the children of the land of Salta, knew all about the Widow's Tomb, where La Difunta Correa was buried. The widow was a poor woman who, like Rosalindo, had plunged out on foot across that desert, but with a suckling child in her arms. Her idea had been to get to Chile to find a man of hers, a new husband or a lover who had deserted her and her child. The icy gales of the Puna had caught her at the very top of the plateau, and she and her baby, taking refuge behind a big stone, had succumbed to cold and hunger. Months later, some trailmen going that way had found them, sleeping, it seemed, as naturally as if they had gone to bed an hour before. The cold and the dryness of the uplands had preserved their bodies.

The devout mountaineers had dug a grave in the sterile soil and heaped up a pile of stones above the resting place of La Difunta Correa and her child. That had been the most pitiful and affecting of the tragedies of the terrible "highway." From year to year the pile of stones grew taller and eventually it became a landmark for all those passing that way. Every traveler thought himself obliged to say a prayer for the dead woman over her sepulcher and to leave an offering. A hermit from a shrine farther on down the trail appointed himself executor

of the dead woman's "earnings." Every six months or so he came up to the tomb, collected the money left there and paid for masses for the unfortunate widow's soul.

The offerings were never troubled. A superstitious rectitude came over the trailmen at sight of them. For months and months the money would lie there untouched, though not a few of the wayfarers following that trail were men of unsavory reputations. On the contrary, every bandit, no matter how great a criminal he may have been, left something for the old woman as a security for the success of his own journey.

Finally Rosalindo reached the tomb. Two black boards nailed one across the other formed a cross over the pile of stones. At the foot of the heap was an old tin can that had contained American corned beef. The label of a Chicago firm was slowly fading there in the weather. The can was weighted at the bottom by a stone to keep the wind from blowing it away.

Ovejero looked into the can and lifted up the stone. His eyes fell on a number of peso bills and several nickel coins. It had been a long time, apparently, since the hermit had made his last call. The *gaucho* knew what his duty was. He took off his hat and knelt beside the cross.

"Poor woman," he murmured. "*Pobre* Difunta

Correa!" And he repeated all the prayers that he remembered.

Then he felt inside his belt, pulled out the various objects there, and at last came to the knotted handkerchief in which he kept all his money. He loosened the knot and spread out on the ground his entire possessions. He had just three pesos and a few coppers left. It would be hard for him to make much of an offering from that. His expenses had been very heavy back there on the eastern edge of the desert. Anxiously he thought of what might be in store for him on the western side when he would find himself again among men. He would need money to live on while he was finding work, and all he had was hardly enough for that.

Sitting on the ground there, he went deeper and deeper into his calculations. "A dollar and a half, and a few cents more. About how long will that last?"

Suddenly he started. A strange sound, an unexpected presence brought him back to realities. He was not alone in the desert. As he looked up he saw, on the other side of the pile of stones, an enormous animal in a golden skin flecked with spots of darkish red. It looked like a big dog, but it had a cat's head, a long, bristly mustache and green eyes that seemed to flash with sparks of golden fire.

But Rosalindo was not afraid. He knew that

brute. It was a puma, a wildcat of the Andes, wavering between fear and courage, not able to decide whether to attack or run away. Rosalindo picked up a stone and raising a wild yell threw it at the puma. The stone caught the animal on the foot. The wildcat made off but stopped a short distance away and looked back. This was his kingdom, without doubt! All the year round he loitered about the tomb, the most frequented spot in the whole desert. There were often the leavings of a meal to feed on, and the chance, perhaps, of catching a man or a mule off guard.

Rosalindo decided not to persist in his offensive. He thought of the puma as a sort of guardian of the tomb, and it occurred to him that perhaps in that feline of the Andes part of the widow's soul might still be living reincarnate.

He went back to his calculations. "A dollar and a half! I won't get far on that!" He looked into the tin can again. An idea had just occurred to him. He was alive, and he was hard up. The widow had been dead for years and years. She couldn't be in what you would call a hurry for money. Besides, she didn't have that terrible trip to Chile to think of. Masses? Yes! But it might be months and months before the hermit came again to collect those offerings.

Couldn't he strike a bargain with the Widow,

touch her for a loan? Rosalindo never dreamed, you understand, of stealing the money, which, as property of the dead, had a sacred character in his eyes, and represented so many masses for the eternal salvation of that mother and her child. Nevertheless, what was the harm in borrowing the money—with good interest, of course? What was there wrong in an arrangement like that? There were plenty of precedents. Tradesmen across the Andes had often used alms in just that way, borrowing from the graves of unfortunates along the trails on solemn promise to return greater sums.

He counted over the money in the can. Eight pesos and forty centavos—four dollars and twenty cents. He rummaged around under his belt again and brought out the stub of a pencil and a piece of old newspaper from Salta that he had been using for a wrapper.

The composition of the note was a long and difficult task. However, he indited a declaration to the effect that he was borrowing four dollars and twenty cents from the Widow Correa, deceased, promising to return it to the foot of the cross within a year. To make his promise more solemn and impressive, he put two or three capitals in each word. Then he signed it—ROSALINDO OVEJERO—with big letters that took up all the space still left on the crumpled paper. He transferred the money from

the can to his belt, put the receipt into the can, and laid the stone back exactly as he had found it, so that the wind would not blow it away.

The puma had come back to the other side of the pile of stones, whining with hypocritical pathos, but really hoping to find the man with his back turned. Rosalindo tossed another stone in the animal's direction, but not so as to hurt him. Now he was more than ever convinced that the puma was the protector of the widow's grave.

Lighter of heart, he continued on his way.

A week after leaving the Widow's Tomb the fugitive came to a camp inhabited by human beings, then later to a cross trail, leading in one direction up to Bolivia and in the other down to the shores of the Pacific.

III

Rosalindo Ovejero worked for some months in the mines along the coast, part of the time in Antofagasta, then again at Iquique, and as far north as Arica, on the frontier of Peru. The work was not very hard and a fellow got whopping wages.

Rosalindo came to regard that little episode in Salta as a divine intervention in his behalf. Why in the world had he ever stuck to mule driving so long? Why, he earned more in two weeks in Chile

than he made in a year at home! Besides, living was better. The climate was pleasanter in this land of exile. What a good time a fellow could have! Liquor flowed like water in the cafés and saloons. Money never seemed to give out in that land of joy and good fellowship.

What fun it was to go into a store where bottles stretched out in long lines on the shelves. And you could pick them off one by one with your revolver, if you were willing to pay for them! It was something to be able to waste money like that. It sort of made you feel much more of a man!

One day, some eight months after Rosalindo had reached the mines, he ran across an old acquaintance from Salta. This man had also been working on the coast, but he had not had such good luck as Ovejero. Now he had decided to clear out—leave his debts and quarrels behind him.

The thought of this old townsman going back over the Atacama trail suddenly reminded Rosalindo of his debt to the widow. So, one night while he was treating his comrade to a drink in a saloon in Antofagasta, he brought the matter up.

"You are going back by the Atacama trail, aren't you, brother? Now see here, will you do a favor for me? When you get to the Widow's Tomb, I wish you would leave thirty pesos in the tin can there. She gave me eight-forty, but a fellow has got

to be decent to those who do him favors. Besides, I imagine the old woman is in need of a few masses. You had better stop at the hermitage on the way up and see whether the hermit is holding my receipt. Of course if he hasn't been up there yet it will still be in the can. In that case, take it out when you leave the money. You have to do such things in a business-like way, especially where the dead are concerned. Send the receipt to me by mail! And here is a peso or two extra for your trouble."

The months went by. Rosalindo worked hard and never missed a day at the mines. Though he had always been handy with the knife at home, he was settling down now, and avoiding quarrels. Let him enjoy his bottle of a Sunday in peace! That was all he asked for.

Eventually he felt sick. The doctor, a young fellow from Santiago, thought it was a case of too much alcohol, but Rosalindo knew better than that stuck-up Chilean what the real cause of his trouble was.

You see, he had not been sleeping well, and he was having such terrible dreams! One day, as he was staggering home from the saloon, what did he see? A woman, sir, a woman, coming toward him —a woman in a faded shawl, lean, just skin and bones, with a darkish sort of complexion and big, black eyes, flashing fire! At her side was a little boy

who scarcely came up to her knees. Rosalindo did not know the Widow Correa, of course, nor had he met anyone who had ever seen her. But it was the Widow Correa all right, he was sure of that!

He took off his hat, as reverently as he had done while praying on her tomb.

"What can I do for you, señora?" he asked politely. "What do you want of me?" The woman had said nothing, but merely looked and looked at him, sharply, sternly. As he went into his house he closed the door behind him, but the woman followed, and the child with her, filtering right in through the boards.

Rosalindo slept in a big room with seven other men, but the woman didn't seem to mind those fellows. She kept right on and on, and finally stopped at the foot of Ovejero's bed. Whenever he opened his eyes, there she stood—stiff, straight, motionless, looking down upon him with those flaming, staring eyes of hers that never seemed to wink.

The morning after this encounter, the cowboy thought he had divined the meaning of this visit. Doubtless the poor widow had come to thank him for the four hundred percent interest he had given her on her loan. If she had had that terrible expression on her face, it was probably because spirits in the other world can't look any other way.

He was not much surprised when he met her the

following night on his way home from the saloon. Again he took off his hat and addressed her in the halting, stammering voice of a drunkard.

"Don't mention it, señora, don't mention it! You have nothing to thank me for. A man's word is his word. I am sorry I couldn't make it more. Next year, perhaps, if another friend goes that way, I will remember you again."

But the woman didn't seem to hear him. She continued staring at him fixedly, while the pale face of her child seemed to convulse with weeping, though there was no sound and no sign of tears.

So it went on night after night. Rosalindo drank more and more, hoping thus to get rid of the frightful visions, but the pursuit of the widow became more insistent as his drunkenness increased. She was now following him around by daylight, standing at his elbow as he worked with pick and shovel in the mines.

"There is something in this business that I don't understand," Rosalindo began to think. "Do you suppose that fellow didn't deliver the money I gave him?"

He began to ask around about this friend of his.

At last a miner who had been going up and down the coast, from saloon to saloon, gambling and swindling the workingmen, gave him news of his friend from Salta. The fellow had been killed in a

saloon brawl in a village at the foot of the Andes as he was going up from Cobija to take the Atacama trail.

The poor cowboy, who never dreamed that his money had failed to reach the widow, was quite dumfounded on receiving this piece of news. Painfully he calculated the number of days that had passed since he left his receipt in the tin can at the foot of the cross. Then a smile of satisfaction came over his face, as though he had solved a difficult problem. More than a year! The note was overdue. The widow had a right to complain!

Now he understood why she had eyed him so severely and why the little child kept weeping all the time. They were hungry—hungry for masses in their life in the other world. And there he was, wasting his wages in drinking and good times, while those poor souls were being held in Purgatory because he had neglected to repay money that he owed!

He could hardly wait for nightfall. When the widow appeared again he would explain the whole business; and to keep his head clear for the interview, he did not drink at all that day. But for some reason the widow did not appear. Not till early in the morning when Ovejero was awaking from a sound sleep did he see her again, for a second, while he was rubbing his eyes.

"You see, señora," he explained, "it was not my

fault. A friend of mine just got himself killed and lost all my money. However, I'll pay, I'll pay! I am going to find some one to take the cash to you, even if I have to foot all the expenses for the trip myself. And I'll increase the interest, too."

He did not need to explain further. The widow with her child disappeared as though these promises had eased her mind; or she may have been frightened by the yelling and swearing that started among the other boarders in the room when they were awakened by the loud voice in which Rosalindo talked. They were getting tired of the fellow, they were. Every night now he was coming home drunk, and talking out loud for hours at a time with that invisible woman.

For a long time Rosalindo had no further encounter with his creditor in the other world. And this absence seemed quite natural to him. People over there know what living souls are doing here. She understood how this matter of the loan was on the cowboy's mind. And indeed, he was drinking much less than usual and working overtime when there was a chance. Meanwhile, he was looking around for some one to make the trip to the Widow's Tomb and deposit the money at the foot of the cross. Unfortunately, no one seemed to be going east on the Atacama trail, though he made inquiries everywhere.

"It's no use!" he thought. "I have got to hire a

man. It will cost a heap of money, but never mind! I have got to get a good night's sleep pretty soon, without that poor widow and her baby coming to wake me up all the time."

At last Ovejero found his man, an old Chilean, "Señor Juanito" by name, "'Ño Juanito," as the Chileans said, for Chileans are inclined to treat words of respect somewhat disrespectfully. Rosalindo had always had a world of regard for 'Ño Juanito. The cowboy never dared open his mouth when the venerable old Chilean was speaking. His admiration for the sage was so great that when Juanito explained that he had never been across the Atacama trail and didn't know where the tomb of the widow was, Rosalindo paid no particular attention. A few directions to a man like that and you could rely on him to go to the end of the world!

"The Atacama trail! The Puna? Huh! Easy as pie!" the old man said. "Just tell me where the place is, and I'll go there in a beeline. This ain't the first nor the tenth time I have been across the Andes, but I always went before in the winter time when the trails were all covered with snow and a mountain goat couldn't have got across the glaciers!"

Juanito listened impatiently when Rosalindo started a long and detailed explanation.

"I don't need all that," he interrupted. "I can find the road. From what you have said already I

could go there blindfolded . . . But just a moment, *cuyano* . . . How much do you think you will send the old lady?"

The *gaucho* figured out carefully what the trip was going to cost. Then he decided he would try thirty pesos again. But Juanito protested.

"Oh, no," he said, "that isn't enough! Just think a minute. The money was due months ago. Think what that poor woman must have been suffering in Purgatory just because she didn't get your money in time! See here, *cuyano,* make it fifty at least."

Yes and no, no and yes, the cowboy finally made it fifty. The figure would eat into his savings; but after all, he would be square at last with La Difunta Correa! It was not so easy to come to an agreement with Juanito on the matter of expenses.

"No, sir—no, sir! I don't stir away from here for less than a hundred. You see, I am getting old, and I like the place. I intend to die right here and I don't risk a trip like that unless you pay me, and pay me well. Besides, see what I lose if I go away." And he reeled off a list of all the *pulparias,* all the *remoliendas*—all the "joints" and "holes" where he played the guitar and sang *cuecas,* nights, seasoning intermissions with obscene stories.

"Why, I am in demand around here. Everybody wants 'Ño Juanito to lead the dances. Even at a hundred I'll be losing money. But I like you,

cuyano, and a dog would do a favor for a friend!" Vanquished in the bargaining at last, the cowboy agreed; and he worked and worked for a long time; for one hundred and fifty was more than he had on hand.

But one day he came around to Juanito's and passed over a bag of money.

"Good," said the old man, "I'll leave tomorrow morning and make straight for the top of the Puna. I'll be back inside a month and give you the receipt!"

IV

Rosalindo Ovejero had not slept so soundly in some months past. He was working hard to replenish his little fund of savings. Every now and then he would stagger home from the tavern; but for a month his fellow boarders had not been awakened by his monologues with the invisible woman.

Four weeks, five weeks, six weeks went by. Juanito had not returned. But Rosalindo was not alarmed on that account. Everybody knew that the old Chilean was always moving from place to place. It was just like him to go on across the desert to Salta, where a man like him would make a fortune in the gaming places and dance halls.

But after eight weeks—and still no letter from

his messenger—Rosalindo began to worry. The woman and her child had again appeared, her eyes rounder and more fiery than ever, her face leaner and more parched, it seemed, by the long roasting in Purgatory. And that child, that boy!

"What's the matter, señora, what's the matter? I sent you your money! I sent you your money! Didn't you get it? Didn't you see 'Ño Juanito?"

"Shut up, you damned *cuyano!*" was the only thing he heard in answer. "What's the matter with you, anyhow? Guess you must have killed a woman before you came over here across the Andes!"

The next day Rosalindo was so broken up he could not go to work.

"There is something under this that I don't understand," he said. "Do you suppose they killed Juanito the way they did the other fellow?"

He simply had to have news. He walked into Antofagasta, where the old Chilean had so many friends. It did not take Rosalindo long to find out from those people that Juanito was not dead, that he had never been in better health, in fact. When the *cuyano* told about his arrangement for the trip up the Atacama trail, the men just laughed at him. Juanito was not the man for things like that. He didn't like cold weather! He had shipped at once on a Chilean steamer and made various stops along the Pacific. He had last been heard of in Val-

paraiso, where he was singing and playing in the water front dives.

Rosalindo was sorry Valparaiso was not within walking distance. Nothing would have pleased him better than to drop in on one of those song-fests of the old man and settle the whole argument with his knife, then and there. So that hundred and fifty had been just thrown away and the widow would again be calling on him night after night, drinking the life blood out of him and leaving him so weak and miserable he couldn't do a good day's work.

Rosalindo was right. The widow did come back. Again she began to wait for him every night along the road between the tavern and his boarding house. Again she followed him through the door, which the *gaucho* now slammed in her very face.

"What's the use," he said at last, desperately. "I have got to go myself, though I feel so badly. There's no other way out of it. I've got to go."

However, he did not leave for some time. For one thing, he was not feeling well; and then again wages had been going up, and when he worked he made a lot of money. Rosalindo, in fact, stopped drinking for a time after that raise of pay. The widow let him alone for a few nights and he began to hope it might be all right after all.

One night, sitting up in his bed, he was thinking of the absence of the specter, and wondering if she

would ever come again. "I'll bet she does!" he thought, "I'll bet she does!" And he looked around over the room, which was resonant with the snores and fragrant with the alcoholic breathing of his seven fellow roomers. The darkness seemed to fill him with a terror greater than he had ever experienced before. He felt in his bones that something extraordinary was going to happen, something more mysterious, more awful than usual.

But nothing happened till the following night. Then at the place where he usually met La Difunta Correa, the specter appeared but she was not wrapped as usual in a black shawl, nor did she have a child at her side. She came forward out of the darkness alone, and stopped in front of him. From behind her back she drew an arm with a lantern hanging in its hand.

Rosalindo knew who she was, though he had never seen her before. It was the Widow of the Lantern, but at the same time it was La Difunta Correa! That dry, withered, moldy arm that seemed to stretch out endlessly into the darkness in front of him, went on ahead, holding out the murky lantern that seemed to waver back and forth as she walked. Drawn on by a resistless force, the cowboy hurried towards his lodgings with the light dancing before his eyes and illuminating with a ghastly, blood-red brightness the black robes of the specter. On reaching his house he

hurriedly closed the door behind him, but the Widow of the Lantern came in through the boards. He threw himself full length on his bed; but the lantern hung suspended at the foot of the cot, and behind it, in the dim light, shone the face of the dread widow, not blank, pale, severe, as formerly, but cruel, leering, the corners of the ghastly mouth drawn up into a smile of malignant joy.

"I'll pay—oh, I'll pay!" he shouted. "It's not my fault. But for God's sake put that lantern out!"

He threw up his job and got ready for the journey. The season was not quite right for a crossing of the Cordillera up to the top of the Atacama trail. Winter was coming on. Friends did all they could to dissuade him, but Rosalindo gloomily shook his head. They didn't understand why he simply had to go! The Widow of the Lantern was an implacable foe. Her appearance meant that he must die inevitably within a year. But after all, it was the question of the money. Perhaps if he paid it at once, the ultimatum would be canceled. What reason would she have to punish him once he had fulfilled his obligations?

One night the cry he gave was the cry of a man in absolute terror. It aroused everyone in the house. Rosalindo had not seen anybody; but a pair of hands had reached down out of the darkness and seized him by the feet, pulling at them till it seemed his

bones would part at the joints. The men in the room gathered around his bed and held him down; but the invisible hands kept pulling and pulling while he screamed aloud with pain and fright.

There was no question about his starting now. He would have to make the journey not only to get a night's sleep back again, but to free himself from a most horrible death. In his days of prosperity he had hardly known how to spend all the money he made. But now he was poor. To get the needed funds together, he sold out all the little things he had bought. He recovered a number of loans that he had made to friends, and which he had never thought of collecting before. With the combined proceeds he bought an old, broken down mule that had been discarded from the mines; and he laid in a stock of provisions.

The tavern keepers along the road through the foothills of the Andes saw him pass on that rickety but still courageous animal up toward the Atacama trail. In vain they urged the *gaucho* to turn back. Winter had broken in the uplands.

The last trailmen to come down had declared the Puna impassable to anyone who should follow them. But Rosalindo pushed on.

Far up the western slope of the Andes he met one last driver, a Bolivian in a red poncho and a fur cap, coming down to the coast with a

train of llamas, each with two bags across its back.

"Don't go on," the Indian advised. "It's blowing like hell up there. Take my advice, come back with me. No living man can get through there. The devil is the boss of the trail for the next six months."

But Ovejero needed to have a talk with that devil, come to an understanding about certain things, so that he would not be troubled with bad dreams any more. He reached the eastern edge of the forest land. The terrible Puna, without trees, without water, stretched away up hill ahead of him. He plucked up courage as he compared his present journey with the trip he had taken two years before. Now he was not alone. His mule had supplies for a whole month. When he got tired he could ride on the animal's back and thus make longer marches of it than he had done before. But on the previous crossing, on the other hand, though he had no food he had plenty of coca with him, and he had not been hungry. Life on the coast had not agreed with him, after all. He was a bit broken down. He felt tired, older.

The cold winds of the high plateau began to blow, fanned by the wings of that devil, the Lord of the Desert, of whom the Bolivian muleteer had told him. Sometimes the gale was so strong that his mule could make no headway; but the cowboy urged the animal

on, pricking him with the point of a knife till he broke into a run again.

"Geddap, geddap!" Rosalindo pushed on, his whole soul bent on reaching the Widow's Tomb as soon as possible.

He cut out the meal in the middle of the day. He was not very hungry, and it took time to stop and eat. He camped at sundown every day for fear of losing his way in the dark; but he was on the trail again in the first twilight of dawn. When the mule seemed to be wearing out, he began to feed it with his own bread. Let the brute eat everything! The important thing was to get there! But one afternoon, when Rosalindo judged he must be getting near the tomb, the animal collapsed and stretched out on the ground. It was useless to whip him or encourage him. Rosalindo understood that the poor animal was done for. However, he hurried on! He would stop on the way back the next day and get the provisions that were left. He must reach the Widow's Tomb that evening.

Walking on alone now, without the protection afforded by the mule's body, he found himself enveloped by the whirlwinds that were sweeping over the desert immensity, driving clouds of sand before it that cut into his face and hands. Sometimes he had to lie down on the ground to escape the violence of the blasts. Once, while clinging to a rock with his

hands, the wind swept his feet off the ground, and there he hung suspended in the air. When the wind was strongest he crawled forward on hands and knees, so fixed was his determination to get on. Then again the gale would slacken for a time and he could walk upright, identifying, meanwhile, various landmarks along the trail. He was getting nearer and nearer the end of his journey. Fortunately he had some strength to go on. But the cold of the uplands was eating into his bones. His arms were now hanging limp at his sides. His breath had frozen into icicles on his mustache and beard. All the warmth of his body seemed to have run into his head and legs.

At last a pile of stones came into view, something like the ruins of an old stone cabin. Beyond it was a great pile of rocks and two boards crossed on top of it. He had just reached that crude sepulcher of the desert when the hurricane broke anew. But the cowboy seemed indifferent to the cruelties of the storm. All his attention was fixed on that pile of stones. At the foot of the cross was the same tin can and in it the same stone to hold it down. Nothing had changed since two years before. The can may have been a bit more rusty.

"At last," he murmured to himself, "at last!"

How glad he was to have arrived—at last. He started to take off his hat to say his prayer to the

dead woman. But he failed. He could not lift his arms. They hung lifeless from his shoulders as though they were no longer a part of his body.

"Well, I'll have to keep my hat on," he thought.

He tried to utter a prayer, but not a sound could leave his mouth.

"Well, I can think a prayer. The widow will surely hear me."

"Here I am, señora," he said, mentally. "I have been slow, but it was not my fault, as you and your little boy well know. I am bringing back the money with the interest that I promised. Forty pesos in all, the best that I could do. That is all I could get together!"

He tried to produce the money from his belt, show it to the widow, before depositing it under the stone where he had left his receipt. But again he could not lift his arms. Desperately he struggled, but the paralysis seemed to be creeping all over him. Even his legs were beginning to give way.

A voice kept saying within him: "Don't give up! Don't lie down!"

But his knees gradually folded under him.

He sank to the ground. How sleepy he felt! How good it seemed to be able to rest a moment! At the same time he was anxious to get his account straightened out without delay.

"Here is your money. I tell you, señora, it was

not my fault. The men I sent to bring it to you tricked me. Why don't you take it? Why don't you listen to me?"

Some one, however, was listening. A living form had suddenly risen from among the stones in the tomb and was creeping slowly toward him. The approach of the strange being did not impress Rosalindo as anything extraordinary. He, too, was lying full length, at that moment, on the ground. He could not lift his head to see exactly who it was, but he could guess. The widow probably was sorry to see him lying helpless there. She was coming to take the money from his belt. Perhaps she was bringing the Widow of the Lantern, too, to show her that everything was all right.

He heard a gruff, harsh, panting sound close to his ears. A feeling of mortal terror came over him. Those two specters! How horrible! Perhaps the vampires were coming to suck his blood, to get strength enough for their future apparitions!

A dark, lean form rose between his eyes and the failing light of the wintry afternoon. Two huge, round, fiery eyes were looking into his, penetrating, it seemed, to the very bottom of his soul. He thought of the fixed, flashing eyes of the dead widow. Those before him were just as fiery, but they were not black. They were green with sparks of gold!

A mighty snarl sounded in his ears, as though

the whole desert were in travail. A huge, foamy chasm, purple on the inside, and bristling with marble cones, opened before him. Two columns as hard as stone fell upon his breast and crushed his body against the ground, holding him so tight that he could not move.

"Here, señora, take your money . . . I came all the way myself . . . It's forty . . . and you lent me eight . . ."

A SHOT IN THE NIGHT

I

In the morning when he opened the door of his house, Juan Fernandez, The Spaniard, nicknamed "The Dove" by all the inhabitants of the colony on account of his timidity, good nature, and conciliatory character, found a rolled piece of paper in the keyhole.

It was an anonymous letter full of dire threats. He was ordered to deposit One Thousand Dollars that very night in the hydrant of the tank which served as a reservoir for the water pumped by a windmill to irrigate a small garden situated in front of the house.

The entire Margarita colony was intimidated by the exploits of certain mysterious bandits, despite the fact that it was formed by men of the most diverse nationalities and hazardous careers; men who had left behind them in Europe a past of romantic adventures and who had knocked about various South American countries before settling in the Argentine Republic. There were Russians who had been driven out of their country by political

convulsions; Germans who had deserted from the Prussian army; fiery and combative Irishmen who cursed England every hour of the day. In addition to these, there were numerous settlers who had come to this corner of Patagonia, close to the Rio Negro, of their own free will: Spanish and Italian immigrants, anxious to have a piece of land that they could call their own and to start life anew on this side of the Atlantic. And mixed with these Europeans, there were also many South Americans: Argentine *gauchos,* more at home in the saddle than behind the plow; and Chileans, a great many Chileans, who had crossed the Andes as the result of some disagreement with the police authorities of their country and who were noted for their readiness to draw the knife to settle their arguments, especially on Saturday, pay-day for the peons, when they congregated in the saloon near the railway station.

The Margarita colony was full of "bad" men and yet the town seemed to be overawed by the doings of those mysterious bandits who exacted money by means of anonymous letters and carried out their threats promptly when their demands were not complied with. Those who defied their requests for money would find on the following day that during the night their fields had been laid waste, their crops destroyed, the live stock killed in their stables, and

the poultry driven away. Some had fared worse still: they had awakened in the middle of the night half suffocated and had barely had time to escape from under their burning roofs through the columns of smoke and the flames which devoured their homes. The odor of kerosene left no doubt that a criminal hand had applied the torch.

No one had seen the perpetrators of these blood-curdling crimes which remained shrouded in the deepest mystery. The invisible bandits gained prestige. Moreover, the terrorized inhabitants could not agree as to their number. Some thought that it was the work of a band with a military organization, which had its headquarters at some distance from the colony and came at night to strike; others, without giving a convincing reason, insisted that it was all done by a single bandit, a man of extraordinary energy and audacity. One group said that the gang had two men; another, that it had three; the majority were sure, however, by certain indications, that no matter what might be their number, the bandits were residents of the colony.

This last hypothesis was the cause of much discussion among the inhabitants and the pretext for giving vent to their worst passions. Whenever any one fell out with his neighbor over a petty affair, he immediately suspected him of having relations with the mysterious band. National hatreds contributed

also to propagate suspicion and were responsible for many accusations. On the morning following each nocturnal visit, the Italians had no reason to doubt that it had been the work of the *gallegos*—the nickname applied to the Spaniards—and the latter, on the other hand, held similar opinions concerning the probable guilt of the "spaghetti eaters." A group of Irishmen were ready to put up their hands and swear that the criminal was an Englishman, the only one in the colony who lived alone, in a small, isolated hut, a sort of tramp who never worked except when they refused to sell him any more whiskey or gin on credit; then he would hire out as a peon to earn enough for his drink. Several Germans, tired of making useless accusations to the authorities of the colony, had paid the expenses of one of their number and sent him on a six-day horseback trip to the capital of the Territory to report to the Governor that the mysterious bandit was none other than a Frenchman, a ruined count who had forgotten his family pride and had no fault to find with his present status of social derelict as long as he could make a living breaking colts.

Several Russians had been arrested and sent to the Territorial jail, enduring the hardships and privations of a week's march. None of them knew a word of Spanish and, consequently, could not give a satisfactory account of themselves to their keepers

or judges. To many this was a sure sign of their guilt. But the mysterious crimes continued in the Margarita colony while the poor Russians were locked up three hundred miles away, and so, in the end, they were given their liberty and permitted to return to the settlement. They came back as apathetic and silent as they had gone; they seemed to have no other mission on earth than to suffer persecution.

"The Lark," so nicknamed because of his gaiety and fondness for singing, was a young Andalusian who had come to South America a short time before. He could not bear patiently the calm resignation with which the majority endured this public misfortune. Every one thought of his own defense only, perfectly satisfied as long as the bandits didn't bother him. As for his neighbors, let them make the best of it with their own ingenuity.

The young Spaniard had a Quixotic soul. He had been forced to clear out of his country because of certain excesses of bravery. He was not the sort of man who could be oppressed or browbeaten; he could not be happy as long as there was anybody around who considered himself braver or more terrible.

"I'll get these bandits. By my soul I swear that I'll get them," he told the crowd one day in the *boliche,* the saloon near the railroad station. "There

is not room enough in the town for both of us. I'll get them or they'll get me."

And he would spend his nights lying flat on his stomach in the wheat fields crawling over the trails, crouching for hours at a stretch behind an irrigation tank or a steam plow, rifle in hand, waiting for the invisible enemy.

"I have come across something entirely unexpected," he told his friends one day with a mysterious air. "I think I recognized them. But I am not sure; I won't say anything until I have some evidence."

But one morning "The Lark" was found lying dead by the roadside; his body had been riddled with bullets and his head smashed, it seemed, by blows dealt with the butt of a musket.

Guess who killed him!

After sunset a veritable panic of selfishness reigned in the town; everyone locked and bolted his doors, isolating and fortifying himself without thought of his neighbors.

The oldest inhabitants spoke wistfully of that remote golden age (eight years before) when the colony was commencing and there was no visible authority; when every colonist lived as he pleased, his gun on his hip and no limitation upon his personal liberty and security, save his neighbor's ability to shoot straight. But now the settlement was

almost a town; two political parties were being organized, and there was talk of asking the Government to incorporate the colony as a full-fledged municipality. But despite all this, life was now more uncertain and less secure than when the first cabins began to appear above the brush of that virgin land.

Even the saloon closed its doors now earlier than in those days, for lack of customers. It was on Saturdays only that it kept open until midnight, enlivened by the accordion of a certain Neapolitan vagabond who, like the old troubadours, led the lazy life of a wandering musician, and the guitars of the Chileans, which accompanied the *zamacueca,* their sprightly national dance.

This general alarm and feeling of unsecurity which hindered the growth of the town made Don José, the Sheriff, highly indignant and he swore great oaths and vowed to exterminate the evil-doers! He had been warned twice by the Governor of the Territory for what was happening in the Margarita colony as if he were responsible for the crimes of those mysterious bandits. He had even had to go to Buenos Aires to explain matters to the Minister of the Interior to enable this functionary to face the representatives better documented. He had not lost his job, thanks to the protection of a senator from his native province, an important personage in

whose elections the Sheriff and his family took a prominent part.

But despite the fact that he had no fear of being removed from office, Don José was more indignant than ever against the mysterious criminals.

"I'll catch 'em; I swear that I'll catch 'em!" he used to exclaim with the same assurance as the unfortunate "Lark." "I have put through more difficult jobs. The 'Bean' and I are enough for this one."

This man, the "Bean," was a sergeant of the Territorial constabulary and the immediate superior of the two only officers, two slovenly and poorly fed wretches, who maintained order in the colony; he owed his nickname to his short stature and fatness which gave him a grotesque rotundity not unlike the roundness of a bean. He, too, had been rewarded with this public office for electoral services rendered in his province.

His wizened face was all wrinkled up by the grimaces he made trying to hold in his mouth a pipe that never left his lips. Always dirty and clad in a shabby, buttonless coat, he gave as an excuse for his slovenliness the large family he had to support.

By contrast, his chief, the Sheriff, still in his prime, was a fine horseman and a good-looking man in spite of his rather dark complexion. His shining

puttees and smart riding suits were the talk of the colony. People spoke admiringly of his trips to Buenos Aires. He spent a lot of money and those who envied him his wealth would wink a knowing eye and say:

"The old man pays!"

The "old man" was a rich planter in a distant province. There is no doubt that he paid his son's debts from time to time in gratitude for the luster which the Sheriff cast on the family name by his ability to hold his political position.

The efforts of the Sheriff and his sergeant to apprehend the bandits made a good many people laugh, especially those who were always disposed to ridicule the authorities.

"We can see that the Sheriff is not gunning for a beautiful female this time or he would not be such a dismal failure," they said.

Others, however, had come to believe in the courage and honesty of Don José and the "Bean."

One night shots were heard in the outskirts of the town. The Sheriff and his assistant had surprised the bandits in one of their rounds and a fight had ensued. The authorities, however, were worsted and had to fall back. On the following day the Sheriff exhibited a bandaged hand; he had been hit by a bullet, and the "Bean" seemed to be still under the spell of other bullets which had whistled past his head, grazing his ears.

"I saw them; I believe I know them," exclaimed Don José, in the very same words used months before by the chivalrous Andalusian. "I am sure now that I'll clean up that gang in a short while."

And his wounds and his account of the fight gave him a new prestige among the skeptical who heretofore had considered him a bluffer, too anxious to keep his job and too cowardly to go after the robbers.

Notwithstanding all this, when "The Dove" found the anonymous letter in the keyhole, he did not think for one moment of appealing to the Sheriff for help. What was the use? He could not afford to lose his time listening to big talk, hot air, and lies. The matter called for immediate action. The police could do nothing for him right away. The one concrete fact in the situation was that he was asked to deliver one thousand dollars, to deposit it that night in the water plug of his irrigation tank, and if he failed to comply with the request, they would probably burn down his home; they might even murder him.

He examined his house carefully, longingly, as if he were looking at it for the first time. He felt for it the love of a father; it seemed to him that he was about to lose a son.

What privations he had had to endure to build it! With what pride he had watched it rise above the wooden shacks and huts which comprised the

principal buildings of the settlement! Its white walls were of bricks which he himself had pressed, molded, and fired. Its windows were painted blue. The door was flanked by two plots of red flowers protected by a reed fence. There were fig trees which he had brought from Spain and was trying to acclimate so that his children might have something to remind them of their father after he was dead and gone. And there was an oven made of clay and bricks with a low, round dome like an anthill where his wife baked her loaves in the style of the far home country. This constituted all his worldly possessions. It was the nest that sheltered what he loved most dearly on earth—his wife and his three children. He was strongly attached also to his horses, to the two yoke of oxen which had helped him to increase the value of his farm, and to a white and red cow which had provided milk for his little ones.

How hard he had had to work to earn his present welfare! He had left Spain with the ambition of all energetic emigrants to carve a future for himself. He was tired of hiring his services; he had had enough of tilling some one else's soil. He wanted to own in the New World a piece of virgin soil that he could gradually convert into a productive farm. He would devote his life to this undertaking that his children might be freed from the

poverty which had weighed down their father.

His first years of American life had been extremely hard; he had wandered with his wife over the vast territory of the Argentine Republic, changing his residence frequently, and, occasionally, his trade. He had been a bricklayer, a farmhand, and a common peon, going into the wilderness to blaze the way for new railway lines. His children had been born and reared in the most diverse environments; his oldest had come in the beautiful province of Tucuman where the orange trees cover the earth with a mantle of warm, perfumed blossoms of snowy whiteness; the next in the semi-wild "Chaco," near a camp of free Indians; the third in rough Patagonia, swept by polar winds.

His wandering life had brought him at last to the Margarita colony. He had been one of the first settlers. When he arrived the only building was a wooden shack which served as a railroad station. The number of the kilometer where the station was situated gave the settlement its only name. In that region recently opened to white colonization the railroad preceded the population. The government would lay the tracks across the desert, marking off a station at a certain distance; these stations became the colonial centers. First the *boliche* or saloon would appear, in order that the travelers might find a place to quench their thirst; this would be fol-

lowed later by log cabins which sheltered the pioneers, and still later by a wooden schoolhouse with the blue and white colors of the Argentine Republic flying over its corrugated iron roof. Finally, the population would give the settlement a name, frequently different from the one selected by its original founder, and it became a full-fledged colony.

"The Dove" had bought a piece of land in the Margarita colony. He had realized at last the dream of his life: he was a landowner! The sale had been made on the installment plan to run for six years. His savings were insufficient to purchase the live stock and farming implements which he needed, and he contracted debts.

His heart sank when he thought of the hardships he had had to endure in those early days! There were the payments on the land, and there were the loans contracted with the rapacious Spaniard who ran the saloon. This shark was the real owner of the Margarita colony; he was always ready to accommodate the settlers with a small loan at compound complex rates of interest! They worked for him; no one could escape his clutches. The colonists experienced great difficulty in meeting when due the obligations they had contracted with him; and the people ate and drank in his saloon, leaving there little by little all their earnings.

After examining his house, Juan cast his eyes over his cultivated fields. The time and labor he had spent conquering the land was worth even more than all the buildings. He remembered his battles with that virgin soil when he first tried to break it to the hoe, the spade, and the mattock.

The Patagonian plains have no forests or high trees. They are covered by a woody, thorny undergrowth hardly taller than a man, but mixed with this dry brush easy to cut and uproot, there is the terrible *alpataco,* a plant of slender, hairy stem which barely rises above the ground and sends its roots twenty meters below the surface; black roots of incredible toughness which the farmer had to pursue to the bowels of the earth, like malignant serpents; and which dulled the edge of his ax or broke it without yielding to his repeated blows.

He could not count the number of "creatures" of this type, immovable and hard as steel, which he had tracked to their subterranean lair and hacked to pieces! Despite this, the survivors had avenged themselves in their secret hiding places by breaking the blades of the plow the first time he began to turn over the soil, thinking that it was free from enemies.

The wild life of the plains had fallen back before the advance of the energetic and foresighted white man who was anxious to avoid all contact with hunger. Henceforth, the trotting flight of the long-

legged ostriches came to an end before the barbed wire fences which protected Juan's cultivated fields; the puma, the small lion of the Patagonian plains, accustomed to stalk its prey under cover of the brush, did not dare approach the house across the open and recently plowed fields; the short, large-headed snakes deemed the soil uninhabitable after it had been cleared and transformed by human industry, and decided to move to the banks of the neighboring Rio Negro.

The patient colonist had conquered at last! He owned a few hundred acres of rich and well-cultivated land. He could consider himself the premier farmer in the colony. He sold more cereals than anybody else; his fields were the envy of all his neighbors.

Juan had paid the rapacious saloon keeper the full principal of all his loans together with a brilliant escort of compound interest. He had met punctually all the installments on his land; there was a final payment to be made, after which the Margarita Real Estate Company would deed to him the absolute ownership of his farm. He had been thinking of making a trip to Buenos Aires in the next ten days to deposit the money and get the corresponding receipt, and for this purpose had sold the crop of alfalfa without waiting for a rise in price which many were expecting.

He had the money hidden in the house, a thousand dollars, which they had paid in Bahia Blanca. Of his original rusticity, he retained a certain instinctive distrust for banks. He thought his money was not perfectly safe unless he kept it himself, as he had seen in his childhood the Spanish peasants keep theirs either buried in a jug in the ground, or in some other more ingenious hiding-place.

To think of all he had gone through to save those few hundred dollars hidden in his mattress! And now they wanted to take it away from him, and threatened to kill him! . . .

He was a peaceful man; the entire colony could testify to his record as a sane, law-abiding citizen. He had a clean slate; no quarrels with his neighbors, no visits to the saloon, no gun play to impose his opinions or to establish a reputation as a "bad" man. He didn't even own a gun, like the other colonists. No; guns are a temptation, and the best way to avoid the evil promptings of an irritable temper, and bloodshed, is to steer clear of a weapon. The only thing he had in his house was a knife which he used occasionally in his work.

But now that they were attempting to rob him of what he had saved for his three children and Pepa, his courageous wife, he would know how to defend himself!

He would show them!

Juan did not know exactly what kind of defense he could put up, but he assumed it as something inevitable.

The good-natured peasant lost his stolidity, realizing that there are times when men are justified in taking human life. There awoke within him the murderous anger of those Arabian merchants who will let the Bedouins beat them and heap all sorts of indignities upon them, but who will fight like fiends and die killing when anyone dares to lay a finger upon their goods.

II

The day was almost past and "The Dove" had not reached any decision. Like all timid men who find themselves in a predicament, he felt the need of advice; he was seized with an irresistible desire to consult some one, to confess his troubles, in the hope that if he shared his anxieties with another person, he would get some relief.

He thought several times of going to see the authorities, with the faith of the simple-minded folk who rely on supernatural intervention to get out of their difficulties.

"Suppose I go and see the Sheriff," he said to himself time and again.

He had never had great faith in this personage.

Juan was one of those who considered Don José an official of the usual type, whose only interest was to hold on to his job, avoiding exertion and danger. He had even suspected on more than one occasion that the Sheriff and his faithful "Bean" feared the mysterious bandits as much as any other inhabitants of the colony, and were giving them a wide berth.

But now the need of protection made him see these two representatives of the law in a new light—great, courageous men, ready to sacrifice themselves like the heroes of an epic. He remembered how tenaciously they had fought one night against the mysterious bandits: two men against a legion!

"Yes; I must go and see Don José," he repeated to himself. "Perhaps he will give me some useful advice."

But when he reached the Sheriff's office he found only Sergeant "Bean."

"See that dust cloud way down there at the end of the road?" asked the sergeant. "Well, that's Don José riding like blazes to hold a conference with the Sheriff of the next town. A thirty-mile ride! He'll be back tonight."

And then he added with an air of mystery: "They are discussing the capture of those bandits. We have them now in our grasp; we expect to land them any minute."

Despite the "Bean's" cocksureness, the poor

"Dove" went back discouraged. His new-born faith in the efficiency of the police force had utterly collapsed.

His friends were right: all that Don José and his men were good for was to sponge on the colony. Whenever anyone needed him for something useful he was way off upon some mysterious visit of inspection or conferring with one of his colleagues. These visits and conferences never amounted to anything. Lies! Bluff! He was probably calling on some female.

Once more Juan stood in front of his house, deep in thought, not knowing what to do.

His oldest boy Juanito was working in the shed where the animals were stabled. Juanito was now eighteen and could be considered a man. The boy was well known in the colony for his physical strength. No one could load or unload a wagon more promptly than he. On Sundays, when the saloon keeper and the Sheriff organized horse races to promote the business of the *boliche,* no one could excel the boy in bareback riding.

The father was tempted to take his son into his confidence. Who knows what youth can contrive! But he immediately changed his mind with a pang of remorse, as if he had planned to drag his boy into unnecessary perils. No matter what happened,

the impending menace must remain his own secret. Why should he alarm his family?

He almost forgot his troubles as he watched his son coming and going, busily repairing a harness.

Juan admired in the boy the rebirth of his own physical strength, a quiet, beneficent strength devoted to work and not to violence and oppression. After he was dead and gone, his Juanito would succeed him in the cultivation of those fields, and he felt sure that his oldest son would prove a second father to his younger brothers. The boy's future was beginning to shape itself. "The Dove" knew already who his daughter-in-law was going to be. Everybody in the colony would smile approvingly whenever the son of Juan Fernandez was caught prowling around the cabin of another Spaniard, "Uncle Shivers," or leaning against the barbed wire fence of his corral talking to the old man's granddaughter, a young girl who combined the charms of the Andalusian beauties with the dignified languor of the Creoles.

Time and again they had been seen walking together at twilight along the lonely river lane as she returned with her two jars full of the muddy and blackish water of the Rio Negro. Juanito would carry the jars on his shoulders, his *poncho* trailing behind, his spurs clicking, while the girl appeared

extremely busy trying to hold in her arms an enormous bouquet of lilies which the boy had cut for her with his *machete* on the river bank. And they walked thus in silence, smiling as if they were listening to some distant music too sweet for words.

The only worry that clouded Juanito's happiness was the extraordinary interest that Don José, the Sheriff, was beginning to show in his sweetheart. Whenever he went walking with her they were sure to run across the Sheriff. But she loved him so much!

While musing about "Uncle Shivers's" granddaughter, it suddenly dawned on "The Dove" that this was the very man he needed.

"'Uncle Shivers!'" he exclaimed, striking his forehead. "Why didn't I think of him before? He is my fellow countryman, my friend, the best man in the world to help me out of my difficulty."

Juan remembered with keen satisfaction the things people said about "Uncle Shivers's" past. He had left Spain against his will, chased out on account of certain hold-ups in which he had taken a prominent part. In South America he had knocked about several nations without getting into any special trouble with the authorities, but inspiring wherever he lived a healthy respect for his person so that no "boss" or "bad" man had ever tried any funny business with him. A legend had grown around his

name, due, perhaps, to the fact that he loved to shroud his affairs in mystery and accomplish things by secret diplomacy. They whispered that he had "put away" about a dozen of his enemies who were now quietly rotting. The unquestionable fact, what every one knew and he himself took no pains to conceal, was that in his verdant youth he had been a highwayman, a knight errant of the Spanish roads, a romantic brigand who held up stage coaches, robbed the travelers, ate and joked with them and finally set them free, allowing them just enough to continue the journey.

None like "Uncle Shivers" to advise him; this man was an expert in the business!

As he was approaching "Uncle Shivers's" cabin, a young woman caught sight of him, flushed and ran away so fast that her thick braid stood out almost horizontally. It was the old man's granddaughter. The poor girl thought, perhaps, that Juan was coming to see her grandfather about her love affair with Juanito. But, alas! Other things were on "The Dove's" mind.

"Uncle Shivers" was alone; his only son was buying sheep at a bargain sale on the banks of the Rio Colorado.

"The Dove" riveted his attention upon the old man. He seemed more shriveled and wrinkled every day, like one of those fruits that remain on the tree

throughout the winter and shrink so that its skin hangs loose. They called him "Uncle Shivers" because his hands and other parts of his body shook incessantly as if he had St. Vitus's dance. His toothless mouth, with its thin, in-curving lips, looked like a gash opened by the blow of an ax in his dry-apple face. His eyes, two points of light, sharp and penetrating as a stiletto, were the only things that gave a hint of his past.

His eyes fixed on the cigarette which he was laboriously rolling with his trembling, scurfy hands, "Uncle Shivers" listened to "The Dove." The latter told him how he had found the anonymous request in the morning and then read slowly the threatening letter. After that he remained silent, awaiting the advice of his venerable compatriot.

"What shall I do, Uncle Shivers?" he asked finally, worried by the prolonged muteness of the old man.

"If you have the thousand dollars, you'd better give 'em up," replied "Uncle Shivers" with indifference. "Money is good to have, but life in peace is worth a great deal more."

"The Dove" dropped instantly his respectful and obedient attitude.

"And it's you, Uncle Shivers, a real *bravo,* who gives me this shameful advice!" exclaimed Juan, furious. "I have the thousand dollars, but that's

no reason why I should hand it over to the first rascal who comes and asks for it. That money is for my wife and children and I am going to defend it with my life."

The old man stopped looking at his cigarette and fixed his small, keen eyes with evident interest on his angry countryman.

"I gave you that advice because I didn't know you well," "Uncle Shivers" replied. "I always thought you were opposed to violence. But since you are disposed to defend your property and to allow no one to walk over you, perhaps I can give you some other advice."

And "Uncle Shivers," affected by the indignation of that peaceful man, became equally violent.

"That's right," he said, "hang on to your money. If they want to rob, let them go to the highways and do it openly, risking their necks like real men, and not come hiding behind anonymous letters and burning houses like cowards and murdering people treacherously. I am seventy-seven years old, but I'd like to see anyone send me an anonymous letter threatening to do this and that. He would pay dearly for it. I guess I know how to stop a man. Easiest thing in the world!"

"See here," he continued, "have you got guts enough to defend your own property?"

The firm resolution of the old man had encour-

aged "The Dove," who now felt equal to any demand.

"Yes," he said, "I'll go the limit to defend the bread of my children."

A deep-rooted distrust, born of his adventurous life, made "Uncle Shivers" cast an uneasy glance at the door and then examine carefully every corner of the cabin.

"I am going to show you the best jewel of the house," he told Juan, his eyes ablaze, "something more valuable than my granddaughter; a treasure that I could not think of loaning to any one except to a friend and an honest man like you!"

And with as much solemnity as if he were handling a holy relic, he drew from behind a set of harness piled in a corner an old large-barreled percussion musket that looked like a blunderbuss. Fondling its worm-eaten butt devotedly, he exclaimed ecstatically:

"Look at it! Isn't it a beauty? They don't make gems like this any more."

The old weapon was a symbol of "Uncle Shivers's" history, it was the springtime memory of his youth. That old musket had been with him in all his raids over the highways and mountains of Spain; later it had accompanied him in his adventures through South America.

"Times change," he continued wistfully; "men

progress. In North America they now invent a new weapon every day; fourteen-shot, repeating rifles, revolvers like machine-guns; and the boys believe they are braver because they have these toys. Lies! Dreams! I don't care if this old friend loads slowly and repeats with difficulty. I never had to repeat with this beauty. One shot, and my man was down and out. Everyone is as he is and uses things in accordance with his lights. For me this is the best thing in the world."

And then, in low tones, as if he were introducing some one who wished to have his identity remain shrouded in mystery, he added gravely, speaking of his gun:

"It has a name; I christened it half a century ago. It's called the 'Judge'."

"Uncle Shivers" had never had occasion to regret his choice of the name. To this "Judge" he had referred all his claims and suits and it had never failed to return a full, complete, and favorable verdict. This "Judge" could not be bought or "fixed."

And while he sang all these praises, he kept the weapon in his trembling hands as if he would jealously retard the moment of delivering it into strange hands.

"I will load it myself," he said. "No one understands this friend as I do."

He seemed to become young again as he under-

took the complicated operation of loading the gun. His hands shook less and showed unexpected control when he opened the powder-flask.

"Powder first, and plenty of it."

He dropped a whole handful into the barrel. Next, he unraveled the end of an esparto-grass cord, made several balls to serve as wads. and rammed one in tight with the old rod.

"Now a good ration of lead."

He put in half a dozen small balls, a load of buckshot and plenty of birdshot and another wad tightly rammed.

Only a miracle could save the musket from blowing up from this deadly choking!

"The Dove," who had watched the operation with increasing curiosity, began to feel uneasy, as if the sight of the weapon evoked the image of death. Before he knew it he was talking about "The Lark."

"Such an interesting compatriot! A fine young fellow! What a pity that the bandits murdered him!" And then, after a pause, half to himself: "I wonder if they will kill me also?"

" 'The Lark' talked too much," interrupted "Uncle Shivers." "He announced things in advance, before he was sure that he could do them. That's a good way to put your enemies on their guard. And, of course, they got him."

In the course of the conversation which ensued

concerning the mysterious calamity that had terrorized the colony, Juan spoke also of the Sheriff and his faithful "Bean."

"Another pair of talkers," said the old man derisively; "they also advertise what they plan to do, and in the end they won't do anything. That Don José is a braggart who is merely trying to justify with lies the salary he is getting. He does his best to keep away from the bandits. If he heard that the gang was here, he would find a pretext to go to the next town."

He paused for a moment and then continued.

"That story about his encounter with the robbers the other night, and his wound, must be false. I have no proof, but I believe it is a lie. He undoubtedly framed it up to get copy for the Buenos Aires papers in order that they may think over there that he is doing something."

He smiled incredulously.

"If that is the man on whom we depend to find the bandits and get rid of them, the Lord protect us!"

"The Dove" recounted with nervous minuteness of detail all the crimes that had been committed in the last few months. In addition to the death of "The Lark," murdered to shut him up, two other colonists had fallen—an Italian and a Norwegian. After refusing to deliver the required sums, these

men had fired one night through the windows of their homes on the mysterious bandits as they were crawling toward their cabins to set them on fire. Both had been killed despite the fact that they had taken all kinds of precautions and rarely moved out of the colony during the day. One had been found on the banks of the Rio Negro, tied hand and foot, and with a torn rope around his neck which must have worked itself loose from a heavy stone. He was swollen, monstrously swollen and disfigured after being several days in the water. The other one had been picked up one morning on the railroad tracks, torn to pieces by the night train.

What worried Juan the most was the certainty with which those mysterious robbers knew who had money in the colony and who didn't. They never sent their menacing requests to anybody without means. The two murdered colonists had accounts in the banks; the same was true of others who had quietly paid the sums exacted, preferring to continue to live in peace.

Juan considered his own case. As long as he had been without money they had not bothered him, but hardly had he collected the price of the alfalfa he had sold in Bahia Blanca when he received the anonymous note. They probably knew also that he didn't like to deposit his funds in the bank and was hiding the money in his own house, for they were asking him to deliver it that very night.

"What do you think of it?" he asked "Uncle Shivers." "Isn't it amazing how well informed they are regarding who has money and who hasn't?"

The old man shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of indifference.

"Perhaps you talked too much in your trip to Bahia Blanca and back. Sometimes people unconsciously say things that they ought not to say. You probably stopped in the saloon to greet your friends."

"The Dove" could not exactly remember, but he was sure that he had talked too much.

"But that's nothing," continued "Uncle Shivers." "It only shows that the bandits are men of our own colony who live right here among us. Perhaps we shake hands with them every day! . . ."

Juan regretted that "Uncle Shivers's" age and infirmities did not permit the old man to devote himself to the discovery of the brigands. In Juan's opinion, "Uncle Shivers" was the only one capable of doing the job.

The old man shook his head.

"They would get me eventually, as they got 'The Lark.' They go about it in a different way from what I was used to in my youth. I don't believe in subterfuge or ambush. I am one of those who fire face to face."

He refused to hand his beloved weapon to "The Dove." This jewel could not be allowed to pass out of the cabin except after dark. It would draw the

attention of the enemies. Who knew that they were not spying on them from some point of vantage in the vicinity! That's how they discovered the preparations made by their victims, and suppressed them.

In that night's business, the most important thing was the element of surprise.

"Perhaps we are going to unravel this mystery in a few hours," mused the old man.

Then he arranged with his fellow countryman how and where they should meet after supper.

"Courage, Juan! Don't look like that, man! I am giving you a magnificent partner. The 'Judge' will be on your side."

That night when he rose from the supper table, "The Dove" gave orders to his family with the austere authority of a Roman father who expected implicit obedience to his commands.

He had to go to the station to meet the train on its return trip from Neuquen to Bahia Blanca. He and a certain partner had bought some sheep, a "remnant," a magnificent bargain, and they had to receive them and count them as they were unloaded from the car.

"May I come along?" asked Juanito anxiously. He deemed his attendance necessary for the better counting and checking of the sheep. At the same time he thought he could slip away during the long wait for the train to "Uncle Shivers's" cabin. Who

knows! He might see his sweetheart, or, if not, he might at least see a thin thread of light filtering in the darkness through the crevices in her bedroom window.

But his hope was short-lived. His father gave his orders briefly. Juanito must stay at home; during the absence of the father, a man must remain in the house to accompany the mother and the children. And then the poor boy had to go to bed—a bunk consisting solely of ordinary horse-blankets—to dream about that thread of light across which a shadow flitted occasionally, a wonderful spectacle which he was condemned to miss!

Juan stepped out of his house and locked the door carefully. Then he heard an almost imperceptible cough behind him. He recognized "Uncle Shivers" by the light of the stars. The old man was standing near one of the fig trees which "The Dove" had planted in the hope that his children might have in the future a remembrance of their father.

"Perhaps I shall not live to see them put forth new leaves in the spring," he thought, deeply moved.

"Uncle Shivers" was holding in his arms the "friend," the terrible "Judge," and was busying himself attaching a good detonating cap to it.

He had wanted to give his fellow countryman his last instructions on the ground so that he might not miss.

"Coolness, my boy, and plenty of it. The important thing is to aim well at the hydrant so that you won't waste a single shot. And when those bandits kneel down to dig out the 'bag' which you must have put there . . . bang! Why, it's so easy that a child could turn the trick. Keep cool and pull the trigger when the time comes."

The master explored the surroundings of the house, measured the ground with his eyes, and went from one place to another, like the referee in a pistol duel. He seemed taller in the darkness; he moved about as if he had dropped off his years, as a rejuvenated tree sheds its dead bark.

He finally crawled behind some bales of dry alfalfa which had been left near the house, a remnant of the recent sale.

"This is a fine position!" he exclaimed jubilantly. "From here you can cover the entire path that leads to the irrigation tank and the windmill."

With two sticks he made a crutch and placed it on top of a bale; then resting the terrible muzzle loader on the wooden fork, he swung it around into position as an astronomer adjusts his telescope.

"Fine!" he cried at last. "That hydrant is directly under the gun barrel. You cannot possibly miss!"

Then he slapped Juan on the shoulder.

"Good night, my boy. Good luck to you."

He had done for his compatriot everything that could reasonably be expected of him. If he had not

been so old, perhaps, he would have stayed with Juan to keep him company. He liked these affairs very much. But he had the rheumatism, and his hands were very unsteady; and he had grandchildren, and—anyway, affairs of this sort are most satisfactorily settled when one has it out alone with the other fellow!

"Good night," he said again, almost in a whisper. "Remember: keep cool and pull the trigger at the right time."

And, cautiously, he stole away into the darkness, a wary, alert figure, the very image of a man who has been accustomed from his youth to walk abroad at night expecting to find enemies lurking behind every object.

III

Juan felt as if he had been left alone in the world; it seemed to him that in that vast plain stirred by the night breeze, the only living things were he and *those* who were coming.

Ah, if they would only stay away! . . .

Suddenly the gun barrel began to rattle in the improvised crutch; the weapon was reproducing on the fork the tremor of his own hands. And this trembling was not caused by the coolness of the night. Juan was afraid!

He was sorry that he had allowed himself to be

carried away by the suggestions of "Uncle Shivers." He was a peaceful man; he should not have sought the advice of an ex-bandit. These adventures were meant for men of a different temperament.

But the very thought of the old desperado served to restore his courage. Juan felt ashamed of his cowardice. What would the rugged old fighter say if he could see him now?

He lay flat on his stomach between two alfalfa bales, partly covered by a piece of canvas, the butt of the old musket close to one of his shoulders and his feet braced against the side of the house. When he realized that behind that thin, one-brick wall slept Pepa, his wife, and the three children without any protection save that of his own hands, the poor man became unnerved.

Only a few moments ago he had regretted that he had not humbly given the required sum, thus freeing himself from further fears and dangers. But now the very idea that it might have occurred to him to hand over the thousand dollars filled him with indignation. A thousand thunders! He would die first!

He did not remember having ever seen another night as mysterious and awe-inspiring as this. He recognized all the objects that surrounded him; they were familiar enough, but yet the darkness so distorted them that they seemed made of a totally new substance. It was the same old landscape, but it

no longer belonged to this world; it was a part of another planet, a planet of impenetrable mysteries, of terrors never suspected.

In front of him, thrown against the background of the starlit sky, he could discern the outline of a black and very tall skeleton whose head moved around fitfully. It was the windmill. With every occasional puff of the breeze the wheel rotated uttering a long, harsh, metallic wail; the pump throbbed rhythmically, and a thin, invisible thread of water trickled into the tank with the faint murmur of a fountain. And there lay the man, his weapon and all his faculties aimed at the dense black mass below, at the tank which was a sort of pedestal for the aërial phantom.

When the metallic wails of the windwheel ceased momentarily, a host of other sounds broke upon the nocturnal silence. First it would be the creaking of an ox-cart, rumbling far, far away through the darkness; then the dogs, transmitting their howling fever from one corral to another; next the frogs croaking on the river banks. From a neighboring marsh the breeze brought echoes of the terrible struggle which goes on under the shadows of the night; a stampede of toads, rats, and moles trying to get away from the venomous reptiles which prey after sunset.

With rhythmical beat and rapidly growing

volume, there came from the distance a boom of clattering iron and puffing steam. A cloud of reddish, luminous smoke shot horizontally across the darkness. It was the train from Bahia Blanca to Neuquen.

"Nine o'clock," murmured "The Dove."

The train had come to a stop. For a few minutes the station lights shone brightly around it; then the rattling sound of cars in motion was heard once more, and when it had died out at the other end of the horizon, the station was plunged in darkness again.

The blackness was appalling. There was not a single lighted window in the colony. The only thing that relieved the gloom was a languishing ray of yellowish light which trickled through the glass door of the saloon. There probably were some customers standing before the Spaniard's counter; unquestionably, people who measured their words, cast nervous glances at the door, and instinctively felt their belt to make sure that they had not lost their guns. No songs now, or guitars, or accordions, as formerly. The Spaniards seemed to have forgotten their favorite national dance, the *jota;* the Argentinians their *pericón;* and the Chileans their *zamacueca.* Trust, the hand-maiden of happiness, had disappeared. No one cared to fraternize with his neighbor. Everyone was for himself and preferred to keep alone and to be on his guard.

In this interminable wait, the thing that made the deepest impression on the poor "Dove" was the dreadful silence of the Patagonian plain. Around and beyond the human group to which he belonged, there were hundreds and hundreds of square miles of empty, uninhabited land, that must be crossed before one could come in contact with another nucleus of human beings. It was different in Europe. There one village is in sight of the next. The fearful silence of night is relieved from time to time by the strokes of distant tower-clocks. Oh, but the absolute, crushing stillness, the impenetrable and appalling night of the almost uninhabited plain! . . .

Juan felt like a man lost in the desert and utterly cut off from all civilization. And, yet, this land belonged to a young and progressive nation; he realized that. He remembered Buenos Aires, radiant at night like a dream city—Buenos Aires with its music-halls, theaters, and cafés thronged with crowds of happy people, bursting with life. He remembered also, not without a sense of loss, other cities of the interior with their police officers stationed in every corner and their streets as quiet and peaceful as a closed bedroom.

Ah, but he was now at the extreme outer edge of all this intense modern life, at a point where the palpitations of the central force were but faintly audible! This was indeed the pampa primeval.

And man, upon his first attempt to arouse a soil that had slept since the birth of the planet, had to stand alone, providing his own protection without hope of aid from any quarter, struggling single-handed against all the hardships of Nature and all the deviltries of mankind.

The only representatives of civilization and its protective force were Don José, the Sheriff, the "Bean," his assistant, and the two ragged creatures who obeyed their orders.

"The Dove" smiled sadly when he thought of this protection. He had done the right thing in not showing them the anonymous letter. What was the use? They probably were more frightened than he was; and they prayed with as much vehemence that they might never meet the mysterious bandits. There was no doubt that those brigands could come and kill him and his entire family and the representatives of law and order would not have courage enough to go to his assistance.

The thought that he was alone and no one would come to help him gave him the courage of despair.

What depressed him the most was the wait, the long wait. If they were coming he would prefer to have them come at once and have it over.

The night advanced slowly; worse still: it crawled along with a deceitful, disconcerting undulation which lengthened the minutes into hours. Juan

made efforts to figure the lapse of time by the movements of the stars. Then he would fall into a doze, his eyes wide open. He could see everything but his spirit was asleep. And suddenly he would wake up with a start thinking that *they* had come, only to find that it was the wind-wheel turned by the breeze, filling the night with groans like those of a murdered person.

Inexplicable hushes punctuated the silence of the night, like pauses in the throes of death. The frogs would stop croaking; the barking of dogs in the distance would die out; the preying animals that crawled over the uncultivated fields would become mute; the thick darkness seemed to wrap itself in silence to shudder more at ease.

"Here they are!" Juan would say suddenly.

A few minutes of suspense would follow, and then the plain would relapse into its nocturnal hum composed of a thousand sounds.

Juan had a theory of his own to account for these hushes. They were caused, perhaps, by the passage of a troop of ostriches going down to the river to drink under cover of the darkness, or by a puma prowling around in search of a broken fence to slip into a corral and carry off a sheep.

Once again was heard in the distance the boom of rattling wheels and puffing steam and another horizontal column of luminous smoke, shot through

with sparks, shone in the darkness. It was the return train from Neuquen to Bahia Blanca.

"Eleven o'clock," mumbled "The Dove."

He stretched his limbs and changed his position to react against the numbing effects of his long wait.

He watched the last vestiges of life upon the plain flicker and die. First, the two red and green lamps which indicated the position of the wretched station were snuffed out; later the saloon dimmed its pale, funereal light and finally extinguished it. Absolute darkness!

An inexplicable optimism began to take hold of Juan. He had fallen asleep several times and in his drowsiness was losing grip on realities.

"It must be nearly twelve," he said scanning the stars. "They may not come tonight. It is possible that God has touched their hearts and they have abandoned their evil plan."

Here in the night, away from everybody, his senses dulled by the immobility of the long wait, he saw the matter in an entirely new aspect.

"Why should those men wish to harm me?" he argued with himself. "I don't know them; I have never done anything to them! . . ."

He was asking himself for the third time this question, which he considered the truest and most logical statement of the problem, when the murmur of the plain was cut by another painful hush.

All at once, the croaking of the frogs became inaudible; only a dog continued to bark lugubriously in the remote distance. . . . Dark objects were moving forward along a path that ran close to the house.

"Ostriches!" explained Juan to himself with forced assurance.

His inexplicable, new-born optimism, demanded that these dark things coming forward should be ostriches. At first, deceived by the fantastic dimensions which night gives to all visions, he thought there were a great many of them, a whole troop. Then he counted *four;* but he wasn't very sure of his count . . . perhaps there were only two.

No; they weren't ostriches. Dogs, huge dogs, advancing slowly, cautiously, on their four legs! . . .

Ah, now he had it! Pumas! It could not be anything else, but those treacherous felines drawn by the scent of his hen house.

Alas! But the pumas straightened up a little when they got near him. They were men, common, ordinary men who had been crawling on their hands and knees and were now advancing with their heads bent so low that they almost touched their knees.

"It's *they!*" muttered the poor "Dove," toppling down from the lofty height of his optimism, and his chattering teeth showed his astonishment and fear. . . .

There were two of them only; at least, only two

were visible. They looked around and sniffed the air as if they expected a surprise. Then they walked to the barn shed and scrutinized every nook and corner, coming back to the door of the house where they stopped and listened through the keyhole. During these maneuvers they passed several times close to the alfalfa bales where Juan was hiding, but he could not recognize them. They were completely covered by their dark ponchos through which he could see the barrels of their carbines sticking out. They were masked with black handkerchiefs tied under their hats.

"The Dove" had an idea that he had never seen these men before. Those who thought that the bandits were members of the colony were mistaken. They probably came from the heights of the Rio Colorado, from some town of the Pampa Central, or from the wilderness of the neighboring territory of Chubut.

No; there was no question about it; these men did not belong to the Margarita colony. His instinct rather than his eyes told him that. But they undoubtedly were the same men who had murdered the poor "Lark," thrown one colonist into the river, and tied the other to the railroad tracks. These thoughts restored Juan's courage with all the energy of the instinct of self-preservation.

Now they were going towards the tank.

One of them got down on his knees, and laid his

weapon on the ground and stretched his hands to search the hydrant.

He had placed himself exactly in the line of fire of "Uncle Shivers'" musket. The old man certainly had prepared everything right. What a magnificent shot! But . . . What about the other fellow who would remain free?

The poor "Dove" felt more acutely than ever the pangs of fear. An icy cold sweat covered his brow. If he killed one man, he would stand disarmed before the other. And if he did not fire and allowed both of them to escape, they would get even for the failure of their trip by burning his house; perhaps murdering him also.

"What shall I do, my God!" he asked himself.

The one who was keeping watch near the alfalfa bales, with gun ready for anyone that might come, seemed to get tired of the bungling of his partner and went toward the tank to aid him in the search.

He also knelt down like his comrade and tried to put his hands into the hydrant. Looking down his gun barrel, "The Dove" could see the dense black mass formed by the bodies of the two bandits standing out from the lighter tone of the tank.

"Courage, Juan!" he said to himself. "Now is the time. Pull the trigger!"

A burst of thunder shook the colony, setting loose a veritable tempest of cries and howls.

A sheet of flames, sparks and smoke spread out

fan-like before Juan's eyes; then he felt piercing burns in his face.

The "Judge" escaped from his hands and he had to shake them to make sure that they were whole. The "friend" must have exploded when it expelled the terrible choking of lead.

He could not see anything near the tank. The bandits had escaped, undoubtedly, scared by this shot out of the darkness.

He wanted to flee also. Those two were likely to come back after they had recovered from the surprise. Moreover, there might be more than two of them. The rest were probably ambushed in the neighborhood.

Juan was on the point of running away when the door of his house opened and out came Pepa in scant attire holding a light in one hand, followed closely by her children. She had been awakened by the shot, and was coming out impelled by fear, worried about the husband who had not returned home.

The oldest son gave first attention to the most pressing danger. The explosion had set on fire the bales of dry alfalfa and the flames were threatening the house. Grabbing a pail, Juanito ran to the tank to get water. His parents followed and the uncertain light of Pepa's lantern fell upon the hydrant.

Two men lay on the ground in a heap, one on top of the other, forming a single body, as if an

invisible nail had been driven through their waists soldering them together with blood.

The shot out of the darkness had gone straight to the target; the old musket had struck a double blow.

And when Pepa turned the light with morbid curiosity upon the corpses and raised the handkerchiefs which covered their faces, both she and her husband drew back with a cry of horror.

They were Don José, the Sheriff, and his faithful sergeant, the "Bean."

The colony had lost its police force, but thereafter it lived in peace.

SUNSET

I

The Duchess of Pontecorvo left her automobile at the bottom of the hill on which the village of Roquebrune is situated, and, leaning on the arm of a lackey, began the ascent of the steep, narrow, winding roads leading through that fortress-town of the Maritime Alps. A visit to Roquebrune had become something habitual with the old lady on afternoons when the sky was bright and cloudless. She had found this picturesque nook—where the streets, paved with blue cobblestones, are often tunnels—some weeks before, and had advertised its beauties enthusiastically among all her friends. Every day she herself would go up from her villa to the esplanade in front of the village church, to enjoy a magnificent view of the sunset.

There was an element of vanity in this daily climb. The duchess had discovered something unknown to the ordinary resident of the Mediterranean shore; and pride in her achievement made her quite forget the fatigue imposed upon her eighty years by the walk up those perpendicular streets of the mediæval

town, too narrow for a cart, and familiar with no other means of locomotion than the donkey or the mule used by visitors to the church.

The duchess was a decidedly flaccid, obese person. She could get along only with the help of a gold-headed bamboo cane bequeathed by her deceased husband, the Duke of Pontecorvo. On this walk, however, despite the chronic swelling of her feet, the Duchess moved with a certain sprightly youthfulness that had been passed on to her old age by the impatient, nervous energy of her mind.

A majestic, a Junoesque beauty, she must have been in her younger days. "A Marie Antoinette all over again," her flatterers were still saying, even now, when she was old. Nevertheless, two deep lines fell from her sharp, aquiline nose upon the corners of her mouth, and her blue eyes were faded and watery. She habitually dressed in black, with an impressive, aristocratic sobriety. Curls of white hair, far too thick and lustrous to be genuine, strayed from under her bonnet. What at once struck the eye, however, the thing that had made her famous along the whole coast, was a necklace, the "Necklace of the Duchess," as it was familiarly called—five hundred thousand dollars' worth of pearls, according to the estimates of people who were supposed to know! This necklace—a "dog-collar," in the jargon of the fashionable world—was a veritable corset for

her neck and throat, flaming like one great jewel, and hiding in a blaze of glory any defects there may have been in the complexion of her wrinkly skin.

The duchess entered the church, which was quite deserted at that hour. The lackey left her side and stood at respectful attention near a little door, swung out from one side of the building, and casting over the tiles a rectangle of blue shadow broken by flickering spots of sunlight as round and glossy as coins of gold. The footman never went beyond that point. The duchess preferred to be alone, sole sovereign of a domain that was hers by right of discovery.

The lady made her way through the church and stepped out through another door into a garden lined with palm trees. As she progressed, her cane tapped noisily on the red flagstones that rose and fell unevenly from years and years of exposure to sun and rain. The delight the duchess knew in this clerical retreat came from the charm of contrast. Everything here was different from the sleek, ornate, majestic elegance of her villa down below, on the edge of the great blue Mediterranean plain. On this mountain terrace, flowers were growing in wild freedom and profusion. Rose bushes, untrimmed, uncared-for, wove their branches and thorns and blossoms into one entrancing thicket of color and perfume. The trees, unpruned, crowded close upon one another, even intertwining their trunks to make

strange, fantastic, almost human forms. Wild flowers, borne hither on the winds, were disputing the soil with garden plants. All around was one confused hum of insect life—ants, wasps, multi-colored beetles, crawling over the ground, climbing up and down the tree-trunks, or flitting musically through the air.

What the duchess was really looking for, and enjoying in advance, was the wonderful view that opened just beyond the growth of trees, where, from a sort of natural balcony, she could look out from a great height upon the sea, and then down along the curving shore where the promontories of the Alps jut out, making gulfs and bays and peninsulas in the azure mirror. In the distance towered the mountains of Nice, peaks that stood out like blocks of ebony against the crimson afterglow. Nearer, on the seashore, rose the crag of Monaco, with the old city on its back. Then came the plateau of Monte Carlo, bristling with palaces and gardens. At her feet lay Cap Martin, where her own house was—a villa erected among the pine groves by the late Duke of Pontecorvo. Near by was the summer house of her friend and former patroness, the Empress Eugénie, with the residences of other princes and dethroned monarchs. There, also, was the huge palace of John Baldwin, an American iron king, who was regarded in those parts as one of the richest men in the world.

The old lady pushed her way through the shrubbery along the brink of the precipitous slope, in search of one particular spot from which the whole panorama of the Blue Coast spread out before her delighted eyes. There she could sit for an hour or more, watching the slow, placid death of the afternoon. No one surely would disturb her in that tranquil garden. There she could rest for a time, far away from all common cares of the world, take one delicious plunge, as it were, into the glory of the sunset, at an hour when the tenderest memories of the past return,—thoughts of all that has been and will never be again,—like a sweet and melancholy music coming to the ear from far away, or a lingering perfume of dead flowers that will bloom no more!

There was something selfish in this daily recreation of the duchess. She was like some despot of music, who has an opera sung to an empty theatre while he sits alone there, lying back at his ease in the depths of an upholstered chair. The wondrous beauty of that dying sun, the purple mourning colors that draped the sky and the sea of that Mediterranean paradise were things she wanted all for herself. And in that garden she could have them.

On this occasion, when the duchess reached her favorite retreat, she noticed, with some traces of annoyance, that she was not, as usual, entirely alone.

A smell of tobacco smoke mingled perceptibly with the fragrance of the flowers. She heard a cough behind the intertwining branches of the trees. A man had invaded her dominions and was enjoying the view which she had chosen to call her own.

The old lady was tempted to protest, as if a trespasser had ventured on property of hers. And yet, when the intruder appeared and stepped toward her, the expression of displeasure on her face changed to one of cordial greeting.

"Oh, it's you, Mr. Baldwin. I am so glad to see you here."

II

Whenever, from time to time, John Baldwin, the American multimillionaire, came to spend a few weeks in the palace on Cap Martin, which he had bought through a newspaper advertisement, he attracted the attention of the whole Blue Coast. Though any number of forgotten celebrities—ex-premiers, dethroned monarchs, retired magnates—could be found in the small strip of territory that stretches between Cannes and Menton, there was not a single "winterer" on the Riviera comparable to him. The authorities were always soliciting his aid for public charities. Philanthropic organizations were forever sending the most important men

of the native population to knock at his door in the interest of this or that good work. Every theatrical or musical function showed his name among its patrons. The omnipotent millionaire was something like a god, who never reveals himself to profane eyes, but makes his presence felt everywhere through his miracles.

Visitors to his beautiful palace were rarely received by him in person, though just as rarely, if they came for any defensible purpose, did they go away without some donation. The few who had met him personally would point him out as a real curiosity when he appeared on the boulevard in Nice, or in one of the gambling-rooms at Monte Carlo. "Do you know? That is Baldwin over there—Baldwin, the American millionaire!" Such information would usually be received with an exclamation of surprise. "What! Baldwin? That, Baldwin? Why, he looks as poor as a rat!"

Baldwin, in fact, always dressed very plainly; and his habits were as simple as his clothes. Though his garages on Cap Martin held numerous automobiles of the most fashionable makes, he went almost everywhere on foot. He chose his attendants for their refinement and good taste in dress. He seemed to enjoy being taken for the servant of the elegant secretaries who sometimes went with him on his walks.

People described him ordinarily as "the richest man on earth." Those who pretended greater intimacy with his affairs asserted that he had a million dollars on his checking account at the bank. When asked why he allowed such an enormous capital to lie idle, he would answer with a sigh of weariness. Money bored him so! What could he do with money? It was impossible to invest it in anything better than his own business; and since his various enterprises in mining and manufacturing had already reached their maximum development and were in need of no further capital, why should he worry?

The Duchess of Pontecorvo had known Baldwin ever since he became her neighbor on Cap Martin—the friendship of an old lady, famous in her time, but now forgotten, with a rich man whose name was a catchword throughout the world. The duchess had found times much changed since the days of her youth. Countries where she had been intimate with royalty had become republics. In the present democratic age, millionaires like Baldwin were the real lords of the earth. She herself had spent the larger part of her former fortune on the careers of her children, and for years had been living a life of gilded poverty, which allowed only infrequent excursions from her villa on Cap Martin.

That is why the aged aristocrat felt the greatest

respect for this potentate of a younger age; and that is why she smiled so cordially when she discovered that the intruder on her solitude was the American millionaire. Hitherto she had seen him at social gatherings, of an afternoon, in sombre palace halls, where the lighting was controlled by older hostesses, careful to avoid the glaring, indiscreet rays of unobstructed sunlight. Now, here he was before her in the open air, and in that garden where trees and stones seemed to have halos of green around them, so intense was the golden radiance dripping from the sky.

She was eighty, and he was quite as old, if not, as the duchess suspected, a few years older. But he was still a strong man, one of those hard, wiry, elastic persons on whom the storms of the years beat as on a marble temple, roughening the surface, perhaps, but powerless to break them down. Old age seemed to have toughened John Baldwin, throwing a wrapper of parchment, as it were, around him, an armor proof against disease and impenetrable to the shafts of death. His dark-blue suit had been cut to fit him; yet he seemed to move about in it as if it had been made for another person. The slenderness of his neck emphasized the massive structure of his head—a prominent, bulging forehead, a strong, protruding lower jaw, evidences of intelligence and will, remnants of a vigorous youth, which the deep lines of his aged face had not been able to obscure.

And his eyes, also! His eyes were as bright as they had ever been. It was easy to guess how they must have flashed in his angry moments as a youth. They looked out upon you with the piercing, disconcerting glare that belongs to men who are masters of men. In them one could see the secret of his great worldly success. And yet their outlines were somewhat softened now by a trace of gentleness and kindliness. They suggested willingness on a fighter's part to forget the struggles of the past.

At sight of the duchess, Baldwin threw away the smashed and much-chewed cigar-butt he had been smoking.

"How do you happen to be here?" the duchess asked, offering her hand in cordial greeting.

"Oh, one of my friends told me about the view from here. He heard you describe it so enthusiastically the other day! I thought I would come and have a look at it myself. You are right, madame! It is wonderful!"

They sat down on a rustic bench of tree-trunks, looking out over the seat at their feet, the villages along the shore, and the distant foothills of the Alps. Automobiles, like so many insects, were running along the thread-like roadways visible far down at the foot of the hills. A train was in sight on the Franco-Italian railroad, though at that distance the locomotive seemed to be puffing in silence and there was no rumbling of the wheels. In fact, the still-

ness of the garden was broken only by the tinkling of little bells that came from a herd of goats grazing along the slopes below the garden—a soft, mellow tinkling, like the ring from a Venetian glass. The sea had turned to a more subdued azure, less harsh on the eyes than previously in the blinding deluge of light rained upon it from the sun.

"Yes, it is beautiful!" said the duchess after a long pause. "It is wonderful!"

As they sat there in silence, the full solemnity of the dying day came over them. "What a pity it is," Baldwin observed, "that we have to wait till we are old before we can enjoy the deepest and sweetest pleasures of life! When we are young, we are always worried about things. We are looking forward all the time. Our hopes and ambitions blind our eyes to the things actually present before us. I imagine that many of the men I used to know, if they could rise from their graves on the other side of the ocean and come here now, would be surprised to see old man Baldwin stopping to look at a landscape and actually enjoying it, without a thought for the ups and downs of exchange!"

The duchess nodded without clearly foreseeing what her companion was about to say.

"I imagine that you, too," he continued, "have had to wait for the years to go by before you could take a really true delight in the beauties of Nature;

though women, as a rule, are born more poetic, more sentimental, than men, and when they are young, furthermore, have more time to devote to what are called 'higher' things. I am sure you are enjoying what you see before you quite as much as you used to enjoy a soirée at the Tuileries."

Again the duchess nodded, quite flattered that the powerful personage at her side should take an interest in her humble self. Something of her vanished coquetry came to life again. Baldwin, the richest man in the world, had come to visit that remote garden just because she had praised it to one of his friends! These new bourgeois upstarts of the day were not so hard, so lacking in all feeling, as she had been told. She began to talk of her past as if the aged American were an old friend of hers.

"You are right," she said. "The life I am leading now is not so brilliant as the life of gayety I led when I was young. But it has its consolations. You see, I have suffered a great deal in my time, Mr. Baldwin. People's lives are something like houses, aren't they? You have to live in them before you know what they really are."

The American millionaire had heard many stories about the career of the duchess in the old days. She had been a very interesting person; and he began to listen to her story attentively.

The Duchess of Pontecorvo was a Spanish woman, by birth distantly related to the Empress Eugénie. She had come to Paris to join the galaxy of beauties that revolved around the magnificent sovereign in the Tuileries. Her family, of the ancient Spanish nobility, had long since been ruined; so the Empress tried to arrange a suitable marriage for her protégé with some important personage in France. The man in whom the young lady showed greatest interest was a general in Napoleon's army, who had just received a title of duke—Duke of Pontecorvo—for a victory his division had won in the wars in Italy.

The duchess made no mystery of the incompatibility of taste and temperament between herself and the rough soldier she finally married. But life at court was so gay that domestic troubles were not terribly oppressive. She had found life quite tolerable. When the Empire fell, and all the brilliant life that centered around the Court in Paris came to an end, the marshal died of a broken heart. He could not survive the overthrow of the Emperor and the shock of the great disaster of 1870. Two children, boys, had been born to the duchess. They in turn had set up new families and carried off the greater part of their father's fortune.

To escape unpleasant contrasts between her former splendor and the modest way in which she now

had to live, the widowed duchess went to Cap Martin, intending to spend the rest of her life in the palace that had been her vacation home in the days of her splendor. There she could live in company with old friends from earlier times, without obtruding the decline in her resources.

The Empress was a not infrequent visitor to the Riviera. When Eugénie came to Cap Martin, she would pay a visit to the duchess; and the two old ladies, dressed in their widow's weeds, would talk of the happy days gone by. But now the Empress was dead; and the passing of that lifelong friend brought home to the duchess the short time that must be left before she too passed on.

Only one memento was still left from her really brilliant youth—her necklace, the "Necklace of the Duchess," a jewel so closely identified with her fame that to dispose of it would be a public declaration of poverty.

"You are right, Mr. Baldwin," she continued. "Old age does have its pleasures. I am now well acquainted with something that I never knew before—peace, quiet, tranquillity. I have no ambitions left, of course. I have so restricted my daily needs that there is hardly a thing in the world I really want. Life does not call to me with the vibrant voice that it used to have before. At the same time it is without the old sorrows and the old

worries. At our age, for instance, there is no such thing as love; but yet, there is friendship! And how much more wonderful and lasting than love that sometimes is! You can't imagine what a beautiful woman, a woman whom many, many desire, has to go through in life. You live in a state of perpetual alarm. You are afraid to venture on the slightest intimacy with a man. The moment one appears, you come to regard him as a possible enemy. The life of a great beauty is like that of the commander of a fortress under siege: she never has a moment's rest!

"For the first time in my life I am free to enjoy friendship, comradeship, with men. That is something I never knew when I was young. It was a great surprise to me to find that a man need not necessarily be a torment! But at our age, you see, people are not men and women. They are friends, companions, comrades. When passion is once out of the way, all the other beauties of the human soul come more into evidence and seem more attractive in our eyes.

"Of course, sometimes, when I see a pretty, charming, popular young girl, I remember my own days of triumph, and feel a flash of envy; but I soon get over that. Why envy them? Some day they will be old, too. They will reach the point that I have reached. The fact is, I suppose, one can be really

selfish when one is old. One can just live, and feel all the delights of just living—something that a young person never dreams of. Believe me, Mr. Baldwin, I am not at all sorry that I am eighty years old; and I am glad to see that you, after your long and active life, feel as I do about it."

"Well, yes," the old man replied, musing sadly; "yes—if only we could always be old! But there's death, isn't there?"

The animation with which the duchess had been speaking vanished from her face, and there was a tremor of sadness in her voice as she replied:

"Yes, that is true. There's death! We old people have not very long to live!"

III

There was a long silence. Then the old man expressed aloud all that he had been thinking while the duchess was telling the story of her life. He, too, found a strong contrast between the present and the past; but he did not regret his retirement, after a life so full of energy that the greatest business men in the world had considered him the type of the man of action. After all, there was no reason why he should go on working forever. What could he do that he had not already done? There was really no rôle left for John Baldwin to play in the

comedy—the tragedy—of life. And yet he went on living, because there is something in us that makes us want to live, quite aside from all the calculations and conveniences of men!

"You have no idea, duchess, of the real extent of my business enterprises. People call me rich; but that word gives no adequate idea of the wealth I actually have. Half the world would have to go bankrupt before I could be entirely ruined. I have to think up devices for restricting the growth of my income. I leave enormous sums of money lying idle in the banks just because I have more money than I can possibly use. I find it annoying to have so much around.

"I say I have seen everything, and where I have not been I could easily be tomorrow, if I thought it worth while. But none of the things that attract men ordinarily have any charm for me now. I am so old that I see the futility of all the varieties of human vanity. I have no children, and my one concern is to find ways to invest my money where it will do some good after I am gone.

"Well, I have founded libraries, museums and universities. I have endowed charitable organizations—though my reason tells me that charity is of no particular use in this world. I spend my money often without examining the bases of the requests that are made of me. I am tired of buying

pictures and subsidizing books that do not pay. I am also tired of giving money for the progress of science and invention. Good enough, in their way, such things—when you are young and enthusiastic, and believe in the future! Now I have no enthusiasm about anything; and as for the future——"

The old man fell silent for a time. Then he resumed, in a voice not untouched with rancor:

"As for the future, the future does interest me, to tell the truth, the way exciting business propositions interested me when I was young. Sometimes, when I meet ragged newsboys on the street, or little cowherds on the mountainsides, I feel a sort of jealous anger at them. They are so young, those little shavers! They are sure to live so much longer than I can ever live! 'Ah, you little rogues,' I say to myself, 'you will be here to see things that I shall have no chance to see.' The thought makes me feel how useless money is, how absurd the respect it inspires in everyone! The famous John Baldwin, for all his two billions, is worth, in terms of future experience, less than a little beggar who crawls along on all fours to pick up the cigar-butt you are throwing away!

"We are living in 1920. Sometimes I amuse myself by wondering what things will be like when you double the twenty part of it—1940! What are twenty years for any of the young people who are

now around us? They are so sure of living that long, that they are ready to risk their chance on it for a passing moment's pleasure. And I, John Baldwin, who have stood before the kings of the earth, and am a king myself so far as money and power are concerned, could not for all my wealth buy those twenty years, if I took into my service all the intelligence and science in the world."

The two old people lapsed into silence again.

"I have seen everything," Baldwin finally resumed, "and I have had everything. For that very reason life has no more attractions for me. And yet I still want to live! The certainty that I am soon to die angers me, depresses me, beyond endurance. I suppose it is the idleness of my retirement that makes me think of such things now, and emphasizes reality as it is. The old days were days of struggle. There were obstacles to overcome, problems to solve. There is a kind of poetry in youth, and poetry disguises things, throws a veil of illusion over them, so that the dreamer never sees them as they really are. In my case it was the thirst for power; and the pursuit of power was an absorbing, an inspiring preoccupation. Now that everything has come to me, the enchantment is gone. I see the framework of fatuity that underlies human existence; and on that my eyes, by a strange perversity of old age, are fixed. It is as if a man

saw only the skeleton under the beauty of an attractive woman.

"I remember how anxiously I used to wait for the outcome of enterprises that meant success or total ruin for me. I have lost four fortunes in my time. More often it was a great triumph. Now, the arrival of a cablegram fails to give me the slightest thrill. Whatever the message it contains, I know it will make very little difference in the mass of my possessions or achievements. Most people, when they have fought a long battle to make a fortune, have to make a second and sometimes harder fight to keep what they have earned. I am beyond all such worries. My victory has been so overwhelming, so complete, that my wealth stands there on its own feet, and a generation of the world's activities could hardly overthrow it. Well, there you are! What have I to live for?"

The duchess, in her humble way, had many pet charities in which she was always trying to interest her more fortunate society friends. She was going to mention one of them when she remembered what the great American had said some moments before. Baldwin did not believe in charity, though he practiced it in a more or less casual way, giving money to those who asked for it just because they asked for it. Besides, she was loath to break in with any commonplace advice on what was obviously a

despairing confession on the part of the old man, prompted by the melancholy beauty of the afternoon.

"I have no hopes unrealized, no desires unsatisfied," he continued. "Yet I don't want to die. Death seems to me something insulting, something unworthy of me, something beneath my dignity as a man. Strange, isn't it? Everything in life is so complicated, so mysterious, so hard to understand. Nothing is ever simple. The moment we go beyond the obvious occupations of everyday life, things become involved beyond our comprehension. Death, for instance—! Well, people have been talking about death for thousands and thousands of years, everybody saying the same things, so that we have hundreds of trite expressions and aphorisms, which we repeat mechanically without thinking even of what they mean. It is only when we get old and find death right before us that we see fate in its actual outlines, and come to understand the full measure of human misery.

"Some people find consolation in the fact that death is the great leveler, that death represents democracy, equality. Well, that reflection may be of some use to the millions of unfortunates who have got nothing out of life. For such, death may represent the revenge of those who have failed, the satisfaction of those who are envious of others.

But that is not my case. I am one of the successful men. What have I to gain by death?

"The thought of death as a long, refreshing sleep, the slumber that restores our wearied strength, is just as meaningless. The man who lies down to sleep knows that he will wake again in the morning. Death as sleep is a fancy of religion, the great consoler of human ignorance. At best, the notion is but a hope, a prophecy, that may or may not be fulfilled. We are not sure that the night of death will ever break into a new dawn!

"The poets have compared death to winter-time, a period of cold and silence, preceding and preparing the rebirth of springtime, the splendor and exuberance of summer. That, also, is a guess, a speculation, an attempt to snatch a grain of consolation from the infinite unknown."

The sun was just touching the higher peaks of the western mountains, casting a dust of golden rose along the horizon, and unwinding a sash of violet and blue along the sea-line to the south. Some of the peaks seemed to be catching fire from a gigantic furnace flaming beyond and within them. The old man pointed his cane at the sinking sun.

"The death of the sun is not death at all. That sun knows that he will rise tomorrow morning in the east, and retraverse the path of glory he has followed for thousands and thousands of centuries.

I imagine that is why, each evening, he bids us farewell so gloriously. He reminds me of a great actor who does a death-scene on the stage, with his mind on the midnight supper he is to have in the café an hour later. No, we do not die like that. With us it is once and for always; and what makes matters worse, almost, is that, when we get ready to depart, we see others in the full flush of youth coming on to take our places.

"Sometimes I envy the great trees in the forest. They die so slowly and so resignedly. They keep the ground underneath them dark. There are no impudent saplings rising in the shade, to taunt the agony of the giant with his helplessness. Human beings are not so fortunate. Decrepitude comes over us, while the young people about us are beaming with the radiant prospects of their long futures."

The duchess was listening attentively, because she judged that everything that such a celebrity thought and said must be important. Nevertheless, all that brooding over death disquieted her. Couldn't he talk on some more pleasant subject? Hadn't he heard any new gossip about the people living along the coast? There was that young woman in the house on the Cape. Didn't he know what people were saying about her? Why should old people worry about death, anyhow? Death

comes to them soon enough without their troubling to send a special invitation!

When the duchess timidly ventured this last reflection, Mr. Baldwin showed himself the man of authority, the man accustomed to holding the floor at directors' meetings. He did not choose to be distracted from his line of thought. He went on talking, but in a lower voice, and with his eyes on the ground, as if he were embarrassed in advance by the complaint he was to make against destiny.

"Human life reminds me of a badly managed piece of business, where the superintendent is either a lunatic or a malicious fool. Life never succeeds in doing what it undertakes to do. When we are young, we work to make our way in the world. We set out after glory and wealth. In attaining them, we waste the years when the possession of them would do us any good. We find success when we are old, at a time when success and failure are much the same thing. The years when we might enjoy them are years usually of sacrifice and renunciation.

"Just imagine, duchess! For years and years I worked like a dog, shut up in dark offices or in smoky factories, when, outside, the sun was shining and the gardens were in flower. Now, when I have everything, I can even improve on Nature, if she doesn't satisfy me. I can make a paradise out of

a desert. Do you know that many women who found me impossible when I was young, I could now persuade to love me, old and decrepit as I am? Money is a wonderful thing, duchess—when you don't have it!

"People all consider themselves immortal. A man knows all along that some day he is going to die; but death is always a concern for some future day. It is never real to the moment! We find it natural that other people should die. As for ourselves, death is something incredible, almost impossible. The young people of the present would not understand us if they heard us talking now. They will have to wait till they get older, to know the full misery of human life. But when their turn comes, they will moralize as we are doing, and prove just as unintelligible to the generation after them.

"People like to delude themselves. They refuse to think of death in the midst of their happiness."

At this point the duchess broke in, to emphasize the necessity of illusion, without which life would be impossible. The old man agreed.

"Yes," he said, "we must deceive ourselves in order to go on living. We all pass through life on the wings of some dream or other—all of us, even those who seem furthest removed from any kind of sentiment. You think me a hard man,

don't you, duchess? Well, all my life long I have been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp, living on an illusion that in every moment of trial has given me strength and courage to push on."

Baldwin reviewed the story of his life from the days of the Civil War, when he had thrown up a promising business position to become a soldier. When, after the war, he had saved his first thousand dollars, he went to Europe, and was in Paris once during the later years of Napoleon's reign, at the time of the famous Exposition.

"That was where I saw you first, duchess, when all Paris was talking about your beauty, your splendor, the magnificence of your entourage."

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin!" the duchess interrupted, very much flattered. "What a pity you were never introduced! It would have been so delightful to know you when you were young."

"I should never have been received," Baldwin replied. "I was a young fellow, vigorous, and not bad-looking, perhaps; but something far less presentable than the old man you see before you. I was very poor then, and struggling for an education. I had nothing of what is called breeding. My hands were rough and calloused from manual toil. No, it didn't even occur to the John Baldwin of those days that he could have a place at one of your receptions. I was content with standing

on the sidewalk, lost in the Exposition crowds, on the chance that the Emperor would pass that way in an open carriage, with the Empress at his side, and, in attendance on her, the Duchess of Pontecorvo, then in the full effulgence of her youth and beauty."

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin!" the duchess said again, looking at the ground, while a faint blush overspread her pale, wrinkled cheeks.

"Well," the American continued, "that is when I saw you first; and, do you know, I have never forgotten you all my life long! You see, boys have to fix their eyes on some great goal, on something far above them. The more unattainable the goal, the better; for, if it is quite out of reach, the illusion they hang on it will never be disturbed by contact with cold realities. You were that inaccessible pinnacle to me. You will excuse me, duchess! We are both of us now of an age when we can say things without any of the restraints proper to the young. Yes, you! In my time of danger and struggle, three ambitions were always in my mind, three goals that were to be the reward of victory. I wanted, first, an enormous palatial residence surrounded by a tremendous park. I wanted a yacht big enough to sail any sea on earth. And my third ambition—of course, it was really my first, the one most persistently before my mind—

was to have for a wife either a woman like the Duchess of Pontecorvo, or the Duchess of Pontecorvo herself!

"And, you see, life often affords unexpected bounties that it seemed quite mad to dream of in advance. As for that palace, I have a dozen of them scattered here and there about the world. As for the yacht, I could build a fleet of them, if I weren't bored to death with the three I already have in one port or another of the United States and Europe. It is the third ambition that I never realized. The one thing that John Baldwin failed to attain in his triumphant existence was the Duchess of Pontecorvo!"

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin!" the duchess repeated in a great flutter of effusiveness. "Oh, Mr. Baldwin, how funny!"

"And I suppose the reason why that illusion has always been with me is because I failed in winning her. I can honestly say, duchess, that I have thought of you every moment of my life. A man like me has work to do, work that often leaves little leisure for sentimental broodings. But I am able to affirm that in the few moments of repose I have had, every time I was able to let my fancy wander as it listed, the first picture inevitably to come into my mind was the memory of you.

"I married, of course, and I loved my wife, I am

sure. She was a good woman, an excellent housewife, a charming, delightful comrade; but the flare, the glory of my dream of love always lingered about your image; and I believe it was in that that I found the stimulus to go on with my work. I understood in a certain way that the beauty of my dream lay in the fact that it would never come true. That is why I never tried to find you when I had become a really successful man. I was old, you see, and you could not have been very young. Your children had grown up and established families of their own. You were long since a grandmother. What would have been the use? Why destroy the last illusion left me?"

He stopped for a second, while the duchess studied his face with interest, struggling apparently to reconstruct before her mind's eye the image of the American millionaire as he must have been in those youthful days.

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin!" she said again, "why didn't you declare yourself?"

The old man, absorbed in the thread of his own thoughts, seemed not to be listening.

"I didn't try to find you because I was afraid you might have changed in the meantime. Now—it doesn't matter! You have changed, if I may say so; and I have changed, changed immensely. There is little left of the John Baldwin who used

to stand on the sidewalk in Paris and watch you go by. We are two old people who have outlived our real lives. The woman I am speaking of is the woman I can still see in my imagination. In my mind no time has passed, and fashions have not changed. The only Duchess of Pontecorvo that I shall ever really know is a woman in a hooped crinoline skirt, in the style of the Empress Eugénie and the other ladies of the Imperial Court. And that is the only duchess I care to know. For that is the woman who was loved as few women are ever loved, loved by a poor young American, who likewise has passed away—a love whose principal charm was its unselfishness; a love never to be requited because it was never to be revealed!"

"Oh, Mr. Baldwin!" the old lady repeated in a trembling voice, as if she were about to weep; "why didn't you speak? Why didn't you tell me then what you are telling me now?"

Baldwin shrugged his shoulders. He had a clearer, a more accurate sense of reality than she. He understood that what now seemed to this old woman an unpardonable oversight, she would have regarded in those days as an unpardonable presumption.

The sun had set, leaving a patch of pale rose upon the mountain-tops, the last trace of its departed glory. The evening star was twinkling in the lumi-

nous trail that still brightened the western sky. The eastern horizon above the Italian mountains was deepening to an intenser blue, through which, fainter still, a few stars were struggling to appear. A breeze had begun to blow down from the mountains, setting the leaves of the garden astir on its way out to wrinkle the placid mirror of the sea. The old duchess seemed not to notice. Her mind was on other things.

"Why didn't you speak then?" she insisted. "It would have been so interesting! Why didn't you declare yourself?"

Baldwin again shrugged his shoulders; for now the illusion was quite dead, and it had been dead for a long time. He had spoken only under the impulsive need for confession that we all seem to feel at certain moments. Ever since he had found the duchess living near him on Cap Martin he had been intending to make this revelation to her. That, perhaps, was what had impelled him to pay a visit to the garden of the church. But, once confessed, the weight had been lifted from his soul and—life never goes backward; peace be with the dead!

But the woman, more responsive to sentimental things, was unwilling to forget. She clung to the illusion as if it were a life-raft come to her hand in the torrent of time that was sweeping her so rapidly toward eternity. Besides, her feminine

vanity had been aroused from its sleep of half a century. A declaration of love at eighty! And from the most powerful man in the world!

Baldwin coughed. The evening wind was chilling him.

"Let's go," he said. "At our age it is not quite safe to catch cold."

He gave one last look at the crimson afterglow. "The sun has gone," he said. "Tomorrow he will return, and the next day, and the next. But when we sink below the horizon of life——"

The duchess took his arm, and began to walk back along the path to the church, her bamboo cane beating rhythmically on the flagstones. Quite unconscious of everything around her, she seemed not to hear what her companion was saying. She had gone far back into the past—and how delightful those memories were!

They pushed their way through the bushes of the garden, lowering their heads to avoid the hanging branches.

"Why did you not declare yourself?" she kept repeating. "Why did you not tell me then what you have just told me now?"

THE FOUR SONS OF EVE

It was the end of the wheat harvest in the *Nácional,* a great Argentinian plantation. The men who had come from abroad to help gather the crops could not find shelter in the farm buildings used as permanent quarters by the peons who looked after the *estáncia* during the rest of the year. The sheds where the live stock was stabled in winter, the tool houses and the barns which served to store the dry alfalfa, all had been converted into dormitories for the reapers. Despite these improvised accommodations, the barracks were so crowded that many preferred to sleep in the open air, using as a pillow the clothes-bag which contained all their worldly goods and accompanied them in their endless peregrinations.

There were men from every European country. Some of them, incurable vagabonds, driven over the earth by an unquenchable thirst for adventure, had stopped temporarily in the Argentinian *pámpa*—a matter of a few weeks—before wandering on to continue their restless existence in the Cape or in Australia. Others were simple Spanish or Italian peasants who had crossed the Atlantic attracted by

the stupendous novelty of earning six or eight dollars a day for work which in their native country was paid on a cent basis. The majority of the harvesters, however, belonged to the class which the native landowners designate by the name of "swallow immigration"—poor human birds who, every year, when the first snows begin to cover the soil of their native land, leave the shores of Europe and start their flight across the sea toward the warmer climate of the southern hemisphere. They work hard throughout the summer and autumn, and when the glacial *pampero* wind begins to lash the vast plains, frightened by the approaching winter, they go back to their homes where the earth is reawakening with the first touch of spring. Every year they return, herded like cattle in the fore part of dirty, tramp steamers. They work and save, thinking every moment of the distant country. They seem to slide over the soil of the Argentine Republic without securing a foothold or making any effort to take root there. When the harvest is over, they flee back to the point of departure, carrying in their sashes the product of their labor and fully resolved to come back the following year.

The best hour of the day for the reapers of the *Nácional* was the evening meal. They would gather in groups drawn together by the ties of common origin or the more personal bonds of congeniality or

comradeship. They ate in the open air, sitting around the smoking pot from which they filled their plates. Although the nights were warm, they would light huge fires and sit close to them, seeking the protection of the flames, and more especially of the smoke, against the ferocious mosquitoes, lords of the plain.

Some reapers who possessed an instinctive power of domination gradually became the chief leaders of their companions. Among these men, drawn from all the countries of the earth and gathered together in a remote corner of South America by the necessity of earning their daily bread and the ambition of larger profits, all the processes of social selection and all the variations of social values peculiar to a human group in its formative stages, took place in the course of a few days. . . . The born leaders, those who distinguished themselves above their fellows by some special gift, rose rapidly; some asserted themselves by their bravery, others by their eloquence, a few by their astuteness, and still others by their experience.

"Uncle Strap," a lean, bony old man, still strong despite his years, was the oracle of the Spanish laborers. His knowledge of life, his prudent counsel, his long familiarity with the Argentine Republic, where he went to work every year, had given him a certain reputation. He was a sort of patriarch

among his countrymen, especially among the novices, and he took advantage of this privileged position to select the best place around the kettle at meal time, to appropriate the most comfortable spot to sleep and to shirk part of his work, shifting it to one of his most fervent admirers.

He sat on the ground one day at twilight watching his empty plate and drawing on a tight cigar which would not burn. Through his half-opened shirt could be seen his breast covered by a wilderness of gray hairs. Around him, forming a semicircle, there were more than twenty-five Spanish reapers, their tanned faces reflecting the dying glow of the camp-fire. A few stars were beginning to glimmer in the purpling sky. The fields spread out, pale and vague in the uncertain light of dusk. Some had been harvested already and exhaled through the open wounds of their crust the heat stored in their bosom during the day; others had still their undulating mantles of spiked ears which were commencing to wave with the first puffs of the evening breeze. The agricultural machinery, viewed by the men from their position on the ground, against the dark red of the horizon—the last flicker of the setting sun—took on the shape of monstrous animals which seemed to issue from the mysterious depths of night. The tractors and the thrashers seemed to change their outlines in the gathering darkness,

assuming the shape of the gigantic beasts that had inhabited these same plains in prehistoric times.

"How hard a man must work to earn his daily bread, my sons!" said Uncle Strap, complaining of a pain in his joints.

After the lament, addressed to his fellow countrymen, he continued talking amidst profound silence. All eyes were fixed on him. His compatriots expected an interesting tale, a humorous anecdote or some other story which would make them laugh or crane their necks with wonder and curiosity until bedtime. But tonight the old man seemed sad and more inclined to moan than to amuse his comrades.

"And it will be like this always," he continued. "The thing can't be helped. We shall always have rich folk and poor folk, and those who were born to serve others have to be satisfied with their lot. That's what my grandmother used to say, and she a woman, too! Eve is to blame for all this. Those of us who suffer in life working for others have to thank the first woman for our slavery. But . . . is there anything for which women are not to blame?"

Afterward, the desire to complain which he felt that night led him to speak of a certain Spaniard who had been taken that morning to the nearest village (about forty miles distant) for repairs. One

of his arms had been caught in the gear of the threshing-machine and mangled. The torn limb had to be amputated. The poor fellow was crippled for life, condemned to endless hardships and privations.

The remembrance of this accident increased even more the restlessness and gloomy aspect of Uncle Strap's hearers. But the patriarch, as if he regretted the tragic character which the session was taking, hastened to say:

"He is another victim of our grandmother's injustice. Eve is responsible for the way our affairs are muddled."

And when he saw that his fellow workers, especially those whose acquaintance with him was recent, showed a keen curiosity to find out in what way Eve was to blame for their misfortunes, Uncle Strap began to tell in picturesque language about the trick played by the first woman on men.

It is well to state here that Uncle Strap had his "letters." Back in his native country he had practiced several professions, read many papers, attended a few political conventions, and taken a hand in certain elections during which he had made speeches in all the taverns of his village.

The event was extremely old. It had happened not later than a few years after Adam and Eve were expelled from Paradise and condemned to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

How hard Adam had to work! . . .

Uncle Strap named all the great things which the first man had to improvise before he could properly discharge his obligations as the bread-winner of the family. He had had to become a mason, a carpenter and a locksmith in a matter of a few days, to build a home for Eve and their first children. Afterward he had had to tame a few animals in order to lighten his work and provide more abundant and nourishing food. He harnessed the horse and yoked the ox; he convinced the cow that she ought to stay in the stable and submit to milking, and the hen and the pig that they ought to live with man so that the latter might kill them whenever he should need their carcasses.

"And besides that, boys," continued the old reaper, "he had to break the virgin lands before cultivating them, cut down great trees, and all this he had to do with wooden or stone implements invented by himself. You must remember that Tubal Cain, the first blacksmith known in history, was then sucking on his mother's breast."

And since man does not live by bread alone, and delicacies make life more agreeable, Adam paid even more attention to his orchard, where the first fruit-trees were growing, than to the more serious articles of nutrition. There was the murmuring fig-tree whose trunk seems wrapped in an elephant-

skin and which on sun-kissed mornings drops its fruit from leaf to leaf until it flattens itself on the ground, exposing its red, granular entrails. There was the orange-tree with the fragrance of love and its round capsules of honey enclosed in a golden sphere; and the peach and the banana, and the melon, which crawls over the earth to absorb the sweetness of the soil and concentrate it in its bosom.

There were times when Adam thought of the apple-tree of Paradise, the one that had caused his fall, and of the serpent coiled on its trunk to inspire stupid desires. He would then look at his orchard and shrug his shoulders. The work of man, with its slow process of improvement, seemed to him better and less dangerous than the extemporaneous creation of Nature.

"He was proud of his work," continued the old reaper, "but it certainly cost him a lot of trouble. You would have pitied him if you had seen how thin he was, all skin and bones, after the hardships he had endured getting things started. He seemed one or two centuries older than he really was. Eve, on the other hand, might have been taken for his daughter, or grandchild."

Uncle Strap was not at all surprised at this. He had traveled in all the modern countries and had had an opportunity to observe how the husband works extraordinarily hard and spends the day out,

struggling to make money while the wife stays at home reading, playing on the piano or receiving visits. What is the result? The wives look as if they were the daughters of their husbands, and the latter generally die much earlier.

"I really don't know which one of the two died first," Uncle Strap went on to say, "but I'd like to bet that it was poor Adam, and that Eve survived as a rich widow, was given the management of the estate and lived for many years loved and respected by her children."

Poor Adam! Sometimes he could not go on with his work and had to sit on the door-step to rest. He had been a whole day bent over the hoe, or had spent hours and hours breaking the wild horse or overcoming the ferocious bull. He felt also the need of contemplating his Eve for a few minutes, that need which many feel of worshiping the beings who have ill-treated them, that irresistible admiration which is inspired in us by the things which cost us dearly. . . . That woman had cost him Paradise!

She was still beautiful, although she bore a child every year; sometimes twins. They had to people the entire earth. When Adam, sitting on his door-step, was beginning to wipe the sweat from his brow and to enjoy the sweet voluptuousness of rest, watching his helpmeet with growing love, Eve's

imperious voice would blast his short-lived happiness.

"Adam, now that you haven't anything to do, set the table!"

Sometimes Eve would be peevish.

"Adam, wash the dishes. It's a shame for you to be sitting there twiddling your thumbs while I am killing myself with work."

On other occasions, however, the appeal would be sweet and caressing.

"Listen, Adam, dearie; won't you take baby out for an airing in the perambulator—the last-born, number seventy-two? Honey, I can't take care of them alone."

And the tireless worker, the creator of an entire world, also had to set the table, wash the dishes and take out his last-born baby in a baby-carriage which he had invented.

Eve worked also. Just think of what it meant to wipe the nose every morning of several dozens of children, to bathe them in a neighboring ditch, to stand them in line to dry in the sun and to keep them from fighting when breakfast was served!

Other worries embittered her existence with even greater intensity. When she was driven from Paradise she had felt for the first time the torment of shame. She no longer considered her silken tresses sufficient to veil her nakedness, as had been

the case in the days before she had listened to the malignant serpent. When she found herself thrust upon the vulgar world, a mere woman, divested of her noble rôle of Paradise's star boarder, she had had to make herself hurriedly a sort of coat of dry leaves which gave her protection from the cold and permitted her to appear decently before the eyes of the celestial beings.

But the idea of appearing always in the same old dress! Was she no better than the lower animals which from birth to death display the same skin, the same feathers, the same shell? She was a rational being, capable of progressive variation, and, therefore, she had to advance in the adornment of her person.

Moved by a noble desire to uphold human dignity, the first woman set herself to make a new dress every day. No; this resolution was not dictated by vanity or by a frivolous wish to please men and make her feminine friends rage with envy, as some ill-tempered philosophers have said since then.

And, taxing every resource of nature for the embellishment of her body, Eve used in her dresses the skins of the animals, the fibers of the plants, the bark of the trees, the feathers of the birds and the glittering or colored stones which the Earth spews in her sullen moments. So important was this work of designing new dresses and so vehement

and furious Eve's desire to achieve variety and novelty, that life changed completely on Adam's farm.

The sons of Eve would not see their mother for hours, sometimes for whole days. The younger ones rolled on the ground at their pleasure, while the older boys indulged in fistic bouts to impose their will or combined to thrash their little brothers. Occasionally the entire tribe would form an offensive alliance to loot the pantry and would eat in a few hours the food which their father had stored for a whole week.

"Mamma! Mamma!" a chorus of childish voices would be heard from the interior of the house, as if imploring help.

"Keep quiet, you infernal brats! Leave me in peace. It is impossible to have a quiet moment in this house!"

And after imposing silence with such a broadside of anger, Eve would continue to meditate:

"Let's see; what about a coat of panther-skin with a collar of parrot-feathers and a hat of cork-bark trimmed with roses and monkey-skin?"

Her imagination repeatedly conceived the most prodigious creations for the adornment of her person. The sense of modesty and the desire to exhibit her beauty struggled within her for mastery. Whenever she decided in favor of a short skirt,

knee high, she saw to it that the sleeves reached down to her wrists and that the collar was high enough to touch her ears. If, in a moment of audacious coquetry, she made an evening gown without sleeves and with a very low neck, she immediately sought a compensation for her virtue in the dimensions of the skirt, which had to be long enough to cover the very tips of her toes and trail on the ground with a swish-swash like the autumnal rustling of dried leaves.

Meanwhile, Adam was almost naked, as befits a man who works for his wife and supports a home. His wardrobe contained only a few old sheep-skins sadly in need of repair; his wife never had the time to mend them.

Notwithstanding this, however, he never failed to express his admiration for the continuous transformations which he observed in the make-up of Eve. One day she would appear with her hair dyed a deep flame-colored red; the next she would be a blonde, glorious as the dawn, or a brunette with dark raven locks. On certain afternoons she would go out to meet him arrayed in a very wide skirt, almost spherical from the waist down and so broad that she had difficulty in clearing the door. And as fashion consists of brusque changes and violent transformations, on the following day Eve would

wear another skirt, so narrow and tight-fitting that she looked like a sword in its scabbard, she could scarcely move inside the skirt and had to hop like a sparrow.

Sometimes Eve would appear pale as if she had just experienced a deadly emotion, and again she would bloom forth with her cheeks as red as a sunset.

Although Adam continued to receive the same ill-tempered orders from Eve and had to do a great deal of the housekeeping as a diversion from the work of the fields, he was happy; he thought he was getting a brand new wife every twenty-four hours. Eve, on the other hand, was bored. She was bored to death! What was the use of dolling up so much? It was true that she knew she was the object of general admiration. Vanity had made her understand the language of animals and things until then incomprehensible to human beings. Whenever she walked out of the house, the forest would become animated with a stir of feminine curiosity; the birds would cease flying; the quadrupeds would stop short in their wild course; the fish would stick their heads out of rivers and ponds.

"Let's see what she has invented today to emulate us!" The parrots and monkeys would insolently cry from the tree-tops.

"Well done, my daughter!" the elephant seemed to approve with slow movements of his trunk and the bull with violent motions of the head.

"Come and see Eve's last creation!" thousands and thousands of birds would twitter in the foliage.

But this ovation of Nature, which in the beginning had made our first mother proud, now left her cold. The applause of the rabble! She aspired to something better than that. She wanted the approval of the higher beings; the approval of her peers. She wanted to flirt with people of her own kind. Alas! The only one who could admire her creations and her refinements of good taste was her husband! A husband is a respectable being worthy of attention, but if women had to adorn themselves merely to be admired by their husbands, why, it would be as ridiculous as if a poet were obliged to read his verses to the members of his family only. No, woman is an artist and, like all artists, she needs a great, an immense public to inspire admiration and desires, even though she may be far from thinking of satisfying them.

As there were no other men in the world as yet save her husband, so little interesting to her, Eve thought of the blessed who were in heaven and had visited her when she lived in Paradise.

"But God is a King," explained Uncle Strap at this point, "and those who surround him try to be

perfect courtiers, adopting all his sentiments and passions with even more violence than the interested party himself. No sooner had the Lord become angry with Eve and her husband and driven them from Paradise than all the inhabitants of heaven cut her and Adam, refusing to speak to them."

Sometimes when Eve was contemplating herself on the clear, crystal-like surface of a small lake which served as a mirror, she would hear overhead a rumor of wings. It was some archangel or celestial minister. Eve knew his name; remembered perfectly that he had been introduced to her and had attended her afternoon receptions in Paradise. But no matter how much she coughed, hummed or tried to attract his attention by assuming interesting postures, the aerial traveler would refuse to recognize her, flapping his wings to get away as rapidly as possible.

"What is the use of being beautiful and well dressed when one does not receive visits, cannot hold receptions and must live like an outcast from good society!" she would complain.

In a rage, she would tear her most original gowns as soon as made; she would then cry desperately. As a relief from all her misfortunes she would pick a quarrel with poor Adam, accusing him of being responsible for the loss of Paradise.

"You, yes, it is your fault!" she would rage. "It

was you who made me lose Paradise and all my excellent friendships. It was you who fixed up with the serpent the plot that angered the Lord."

"If you gave a little more attention to our children," Adam would dare to suggest. "And devoted less time to your gowns. . . ."

Her indignation at these vulgar hints from her husband would make Eve wax poetical.

"You poor, poor idiot!" she would reply, "how can I make you understand? Look at the wind. It is less interesting than Eve; it lacks a body, and yet it moves not without wrapping itself in a mantle of dust when it travels along the roads or in a cloak of dry leaves when it journeys through the woods!"

Occasionally a cherub would fly around the farm like a lost pigeon. A fugitive for a few hours from the celestial choruses, he had ventured to the lower regions of the earth, hoping to obtain forgiveness for this escapade by telling the kind Lord everything he had seen and how human affairs were getting on after the first sin. Eve, with the eyes of a curious woman, was not long in discovering the chubby head, hidden behind the thick foliage of a tree spying on her.

"My child! . . ." she would call up to him, smiling one of her best smiles; "do you come from above? How is the Lord?"

The celestial child, upon being found out, would

draw near and drop upon the lap of the first woman.

The Lord was the same as ever; immutable and magnificent.

"When you see him," Eve would recommend, "tell him that I deeply regret my disobedience. . . . The fine time I had in Paradise! What splendid afternoon receptions we had there! How *chic* they were! And the celestial tarts!"

This was another of her regrets—the celestial tarts. She missed them as much as her distinguished connections. Adam tried in vain to sharpen his wits to find an adequate substitute; he made corn cakes and served them with the honey of bees recently subdued; he tried the grape, inventing the raisin before there was wine and making pudding with it. Neither of these could make his wife forget the sweet tarts that she used to order from heaven for the receptions she gave in Paradise from five to seven.

"Tell him also," Eve would continue to instruct the angel, "that we have to work a great deal and suffer even more. Tell him we want to see him again, just once again, that he may hear our apologies and know our troubles. My husband and I want to be sure that he does not bear us any ill will."

"I shall do as you say," the winged child would reply. Then the angel would flap his wings twice and—presto!—he was lost in the clouds.

Many and frequent were the messages of this kind sent without Eve receiving any response. Generally the cherub never returned to the human dominions, but once in a while Adam's wife would recognize the face of some other celestial flier.

"I know who you are, my little fellow," Eve would admonish. "You were around here last week. Did you deliver my message to the Lord? What did he reply to my petition?"

The angels nearly always remained silent or mumbled a few meaningless words, like well-bred boys who know that one must never say disagreeable things to a lady.

"But he must have said something," poor Eve would insist. "Come, now, speak!"

And it so happened that she met once one of the most daring cherubs—a little fellow with a roguish face who answered her:

"Yes, ma'am; he *did* say something. When I gave him your message the Lord answered: 'But is that pair of scoundrels still alive?' "

Eve chose to believe that it was a childish prank. The Lord could not have said that. If he continued to remain invisible it was due, no doubt, to his being very busy managing his infinite dominions which scarcely left him a moment for rest.

One morning her faith in the divine kindness

was rewarded. A heavenly messenger boy came hopping down from cloud to cloud, paging Eve at the top of his voice.

"Listen here, woman," he said breezily, "if it does not rain this afternoon, the Lord may come around for a short visit. It's so long since he saw the earth! Last night, talking to Michael, the archangel, he said: 'I wonder what has become of that pair of rascals. I'd like to see them again!' "

Eve was overwhelmed by the announcement of this visit, despite the fact that she had desired it so vehemently. She shouted after Adam, who was in a neighboring field, his back bent over his work, as usual, and he came running.

"There was some excitement on that farm, boys!" explained Uncle Strap. "It was just like the eve of a patron-saint celebration in one of our Spanish villages, when the women start fixing the house and begin to make preparations to cook the grand meal of the following day. Well, Adam's wife swept and washed the floor of the parlor, the kitchen and the bedroom. Then she put a new spread on the bed and scrubbed the chairs with soap and sand. She next turned her attention to the family clothes, and when she saw that her husband's lamb-skin coat was not presentable, she made him in a few minutes a shirt of dry leaves. For a man it was good enough!"

Then Eve devoted the rest of the time to her own embellishment. She stood perplexed before the few hundred gowns which she had designed and stored away.

"My lands! What shall I put on to receive such a powerful personage?" she asked herself. "I haven't a thing to wear!"

She looked fondly for one brief moment at a long, black gown of severe cut which did not show a single line of her white body. She thought at once that all those coming to visit her were men and that it would not be right to receive them so austerely. She had just selected one of those mixed dresses which was extremely daring at one end and compensatingly prudish at the other, when a veritable tempest of cries and screams broke upon her. An uprising of her numerous progeny! There were scarcely a hundred of them, and yet it seemed that the entire world was screaming. For the first time in her life, Eve took a good look at her children. They were too ugly to be presented to the Almighty. Their hair was tangled, and their noses crusty with dirt.

Eve, absorbed entirely by her fashions, had neglected them for months.

"How can I present these rogues to the Lord?" she exclaimed in despair. "The Lord is going to say that I am slovenly, and a poor mother. The

fact is that the Lord is a man and men don't realize how hard it is to take care of so many brats."

And, thereupon, she began to abuse Adam as if he were solely responsible for the state of neglect in which the children found themselves.

But time flew and something had to be done. After many doubts and much hesitation, she selected her favorite sons (Is there a mother who does not have them?) and washed and dressed them becomingly. The others she drove toward a stable, and locked them up despite their protests.

They were coming! Eve barely had time enough to rearrange her dress, smoothing the wrinkles made during her struggle with the wretched children, and to give her hair a final touch.

On the line of the horizon, a cloudlike column, very white and luminous, descended from heaven until it touched the earth. The earth resounded with the beating of innumerable wings and the music of a great chorus whose hosannas seemed to echo and re-echo through infinite space.

The first celestial tourists were beginning to alight from the interior of a cloud in which they had arrived; some were already walking along the path which led to the farmhouse, surrounded by such radiance that it seemed as if all the stars of heaven had come down to play among Adam's wheat-fields.

First came the guard of honor, a detachment of archangels arrayed from top to toe in shining, golden armor. After sheathing their flaming swords, all approached Eve to greet and compliment her, assuring her that she grew younger every day and that she was just as pretty and attractive as when she was in Paradise.

"All soldiers are like that," explained Uncle Strap. "Wherever there is a woman, there they go as if the order to charge had been sounded. Some of them, bolder than the others, stretched their arms trying to combine action with words, and Eve had to use her broom. They fled before her counter-offensive and ran all over the orchard."

Uncle Strap chuckled and continued:

"Poor Adam didn't know what to do. 'There go my figs and peaches—all my fruit' and he threw up his hands. I think he would have preferred to have been hit by a cyclone. He swore a little, but kept his temper like the tactful man he was."

The Lord had arrived. His beard was of shining silver and on his head he carried a splendent triangle which flashed like the sun. Behind him came Michael in armor richly inlaid with precious stones arranged in fantastic designs, followed by the ministers and high dignitaries of the celestial court.

"The Creator greeted Adam with a pitying smile," said Uncle Strap. " 'How are you getting

along, poor fellow?' the Lord asked him. 'Has your wife got you into any new adventures?' And he gave Eve a little slap in the face, the sort of slap one gives to a person with a bad reputation but likable ways, and he said, 'Hallo, you scapegrace; have you turned over a new leaf?' "

Overwhelmed by so much simplicity and affability, the couple offered the Lord the only thing they had at home which resembled a throne—an armchair!

"And it was some chair, boys!" exclaimed Uncle Strap enthusiastically. "Roomy, comfortable, made of strong carob wood, with a seat of the finest esparto-grass braid—that sort of armchair that only the parish priest of a rich village could afford."

The Lord, comfortably seated in the armchair, and quite pleased, was hearing all about Adam's affairs, his hardships, the troubles he had to get food for himself and his family.

"Serves thee right, Adam," he would answer, his resplendent beard bisected by the most engaging smile. "That will teach thee never again to disobey thine elders, and, especially, never to follow again the advice of a woman. Didst thou think thou hadst come to the world to get free meals, as in Paradise, and follow thine own caprices? Suffer, my son; work and endure, and thus wilt thou learn to respect thy superiors."

Then the Creator would look at Eve. At first his glances were full of curiosity and anger. She was the first woman he had ever seen dressed. Whence came that rare animal of fantastic plumage, that wingless parrot whose absurd shape and discordant colors he had been unable to conceive even in his wildest moments of creative frenzy when he made the world?

Eve, realizing that she was being observed, would assume postures of studious carelessness. She would artfully place herself in positions which showed her charms and finery to the best advantage. And she would smile the sweetest smile!

"And the Almighty," Uncle Strap commented, "began to admit that there was a certain charm in those feminine creations which at first had seemed to him so incoherent. 'Frivolous, she is the same frivolous young woman,' whispered the Lord, speaking of Eve, to the mighty champion Michael, who followed him everywhere and stood now behind his armchair. 'This girl is the same little goose we knew. But that frippery isn't bad at all. I admit that it is not bad at all.' "

It is possible that these considerations, together with Eve's best smiles and Adam's humble silence, softened the Lord's heart. He seemed to regret his previous asperity and added kindly:

"Don't think that I'm going to forgive you and

permit you to return to the pleasures of Paradise. What is done is done. My curse must be expiated. My word is sacred; if I broke it I would deny myself. . . . But since I have come into your home, I shall not go away without leaving some remembrance of my stay. To you there is nothing I can give; you are accursed. But your children are innocent and it is my wish to give them a gift. I thought you had a larger progeny. Four only! . . . My presents certainly will not ruin me. Come, Eve, bring forth your children."

The four imps lined up in front of the Almighty and he looked them over carefully for a long while.

"Step forward!" said the Lord at last, designating a fat, serious, keen-eyed little fellow who had been watching the proceedings with knitted brows and finger stuck in his nose. "Thou shalt be given the power of judging thine equals. Thou shalt be the dispenser of Justice; at thy pleasure shalt thou interpret the laws made by the others. Thine will be the privilege to say what is right and what is wrong, changing thine opinion every century. Thou shalt subject all delinquents to the same rules which will be about as wise as trying to cure all the sick with the same medicine. Thy position will be the most secure, the most impregnable. Men will eventually question all things and doubt everything; some day they will discuss me and even deny my

existence. But fear thou not for thyself. Thou shalt be august and infallible Justice without which life is impossible. Even those who pride themselves in their utter unbelief will become indignant if any one with the audacity of a madman should dare to question thy usefulness. If thou shouldst perchance blunder terribly, the majority will conceal thy horrible error in the name of 'the inviolability of judicial judgments.'"

Then he motioned to another boy to step forward. This one was a dark, jolly, frisky little man with a sharp-pointed head, strong jaw, and ears which projected somewhat from his skull. He always carried a club in his right hand to beat his brothers. At mealtime he snatched the best morsels from the others, threatening them with his cudgel. When he came within a few paces of the Almighty, he stood at rigid attention, arms straight down at his sides, eyes front, like a well-drilled German soldier.

The Lord said:

"Thou shalt be the warrior and chieftain. Thou shalt lead men unto death as a butcher drives the herds to the slaughter-house; and despite this, all shall admire and acclaim thee, even the sons of the slaughtered, for thou shalt use as fetishes of inexhaustible power the words 'Glory, Honor, Country and Flag.' Men will have laws and commandments

which will bid them 'Thou shalt not kill; thou shalt not steal; thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.' But, like a demigod, thou shalt live beyond Good and Evil. If the others kill, they will be adjudged criminals and will end their days in a prison or on the scaffold. Thou, on the other hand, shalt be the greater in proportion as thou killest, and when the people shall see thee covered with human blood, they will exclaim, 'Behold the hero!'

"Shouldst thou desire to seize a territory, the first thing thou must do is to use force and occupy it, exterminating all those who try to stop thee. Thou wilt never fail to find jurists who will prove that thou hadst a clear right to the conquered lands. Strike hard and thou shalt conquer. Thou wilt be right as long as thou art victorious. No one will dare bring the conqueror to account; nay, even the priests of all the religions will chant pæans of praise in their temples to celebrate thy triumph. Drown the land in blood, put the people to the sword, burn their cities, kill, destroy—poets will sing thee, and historians will record thy deeds with greater enthusiasm than if thou wert a benefactor devoted to the conquests of peace. Those who attempt to imitate thee without wearing a dress of a certain pattern and color will drag a chain and ball in prison. Enough. Thou mayst retire.

"Let the next one come forward."

The third one was slender, bilious, fidgety, with shrewd eyes.

The Lord thought a moment before deciding upon a present. Then he said:

"Thou shalt control the wealth of the world. Thou shalt be the merchant and the banker. To the kings thou shalt lend money and this will enable thee to treat them as thine equals. If thou succeedest in ruining a whole nation for thine own profit, the world will admire thine ability. Thy great financial coups will spread panic over the entire universe, giving the cities hours of mortal anguish. Thy victories in the Stock Exchange will be echoed by the suicidal shots of thy victims and the mourning of their families. Thou wilt precipitate incomprehensible wars and speed ruinous peace treaties. Thou wilt cause the sending of battleships and armies to support unjust and usurious claims against weaker nations. Thy children will patronize the noblest arts, pensioning with modest unobtrusiveness chorus girls, opera singers, or mere wearers of fashionable gowns. Thou shalt have arrived too late upon the scene on account of thy business affairs to be the Mæcenas of this class, and wilt be satisfied to be the patron of painters. The most absolute disparity of opinions will accompany the memory of thy name for a generation or two. For

thy name, like those of tenors and actors, will only live as long as those who knew thee. 'He was a servant of human progress,' some will say, remembering thy fleets of merchantmen and the railroads which thou audaciously sent across the deserts. 'He was a scoundrel,' others will affirm, bearing in mind that thou hadst left a graveyard full of laborers for every kilometer of tracks laid. 'He was a monster. To make his millions he sacrificed more lives than a conquerer. . . .' And both groups will be right; both will be speaking the truth, because the most humorous thing in the life of men is that they will be eternally talking about truth, absolute and unquestionable truth, when, as a matter of fact, that absolute truth will be nothing but a dream. There will be always as many truths as there are interests. . . . Keep this ever fresh in thy memory and follow thy path."

The fourth stepped to the front.

"The Lord just roared when he saw the looks of the little rascal," said Uncle Strap. "Ah, but he was a pretentious little cuss! The Almighty knew at once that this was the mother's pet."

And so he was. The only time when Eve had doubts about the justice of her preference was when she compared this boy with his large-eared brother, the one who always carried a cudgel. Woman feels an irresistible attraction for the warrior. But

as soon as her darling opened his mouth, Eve was completely subjugated and had to recognize his superiority over all the others.

The Lord continued to examine the diminutive personage with undisguised amusement. He took mental note of the boy's broad shoulders, large head, and deep brow. His eyes were haughty and there was a certain disdainful air of royalty about his lips. Comedian and king—he had something of each.

The boy stood in the presence of the Creator with complete self-possession, one hand on his breast and the other resting on a chair, and he raised his head as if he were inspired or posing for the sculptor of his future statue.

He had all the arrogance of a Senator—a senator whose growth had been arrested in childhood, keeping the physique of a boy of ten.

His mother knew him well. If he was hungry and wanted a piece of bread, he would not howl for it like a normal boy.

"Dame Eve, I rise for a question of privilege," he would say with a premature sense of the niceties of parliamentary usage. "May I have a piece of bread?"

And so, whenever Eve needed some one to keep her numerous progeny quiet, while she devoted her-

self to one of her dressmaking tasks, she would always call on him for help.

"Come, dearie," she would say. "Be a good boy and amuse your brothers for a little while with one of your speeches."

And the little fellow, carried away by his own eloquence, would talk and talk, saying nothing in particular, but giving his mother time to finish a dress while he held forth.

"Thou shalt be the king of the world," said the Almighty. "Thou shalt be the orator—that means everything. Despite their power, thy brothers will live under thy shadow. The warrior will obey thee; the judge will stand by thee to maintain his position. The banker will ask thee to be his lawyer and will entrust to thee the defense of his foul deals. Thou wilt speak well and this will be sufficient for the world to proclaim thee the most learned man on earth. Without need of reading anything, thou wilt speak fluently on all subjects; thy knowledge will be second-hand and yet people will believe thee a predestined man. In troublous times, thou wilt be the only hope of thy country. 'Let's place him at the head of the Government,' they will say. 'He speaks better than the rest of them.'

"Humanity will be guided by this sort of logic: to govern a nation, to administer its treasure, to

command its forces, there is nothing like the ability to make a good speech; nothing like the power to speak fluently and tirelessly. When the time comes to make war, an orator will be placed at the head of the armies, and when peace has to be negotiated, it will be entrusted to a Congress of orators. The word even more than the sword will rule the world. Speak, my son, speak eloquently and everlastingly, and the earth will be thine."

Poor Adam wept in silence out of sheer gratitude to the Lord for his bountiful mercies. His sons had just received complete dominion over the earth.

Meanwhile it was evident that Eve was nervous and restless. Several times she had been on the point of interrupting the Lord, of speaking one word, just one word, but she had held back at the last moment. How could she dare cut off the stream of royal gifts which was pouring over the heads of her sons. . . . But remorse gnawed her mother's heart. She thought of the poor children locked in the stable who were going to be left out of the distribution through her fault.

"I am going to show them to the Almighty—" she whispered to Adam.

"It's too late," objected her husband. "It would be asking too much. The Lord would be angry."

Precisely at that very moment the Archangel Michael, who had come to the home of the two

reprobates half-heartedly, was urging his Divine Majesty to take leave. He could no longer bear this unexpected visit and was politely protesting against it with all the circumspection of a Minister of War who has a proper regard for the whims of his royal master.

"Your Divine Majesty, it is growing late. The sun is very low on the horizon; the nights are cool. As Your Majesty's age, it would be . . ." he said.

Michael was worried. There was sadness in the eyes of the blond warrior; many a silver thread dimmed the glitter of his golden locks. He had Satan on his mind. Satan, also, had once been blond, arrogant, militant as his conqueror, and was now ugly, dejected and despised, like all defeated rebels.

During long centuries, Michael had permitted the celestial painters and sculptors to exhibit him with Satan, his adversary and former comrade, fallen at his feet, subdued by his mighty spear. There had been no danger that any subject of the heavenly realms should ever take a notion to go over to the enemy's camp. Ah, no! They were far too clever to make such an egregious mistake. But now it was different. Satan was beginning to stir as if he would make another attempt to renew the struggle. He was counting on an extraordinary

reinforcement. He felt that fresh troops were drawing near to join the battle on his side. Undoubtedly, Satan was depending on the assistance of the men who were going to people the earth. And Michael foresaw a succession of battles from which he might not always emerge victorious. Ah! who could tell what the future held in store for him? The rôles might be changed. Satan might win and rise up after the battle flushed with the arrogance of the conqueror, trampling under foot the erstwhile victorious and now crushed Michael.

"Sire," he said again, "let us withdraw from the contact of these beggars."

And the Lord rose from his armchair. From outside the farmhouse came the shrill notes of the Archangels' silver trumpets sounding "assemble." The members of the divine escort descended from the trees, shaking them so much that not a single fruit, not even a leaf was left on them. The passage of a cloud of locusts could not have done as much damage.

The guard of honor lined up in two files on each side of the door and presented arms to their sovereign as he passed out slowly, leaning on Michael's arm. Suddenly Eve ran across their path.

"A moment, Your Majesty," she cried. Then she ran to the stable and pushed the door open.

"I have not told the whole truth," she cried

pathetically, heart-broken with remorse. "There are more of them. Have mercy on these poor little ones. Give them something, my Lord. Remember them in your divine munificence."

The Almighty looked with stupor and disgust upon that rabble. The divine minister knitted his brow, his right hand instinctively feeling for the sword hilt. He recognized the enemy in that seething mass of human wretches. It was on these monsters that his infernal adversary counted for the future. They were the last reserves, the troops of despair. What a pity that he could not crush them right then and there. . . .

"Let us go, My Lord," said he, gently pushing his sovereign. "We must not give anything to this *canaille*. It is better that they should perish."

And he pushed Eve with even greater rudeness, ordering her to get out of the way and not to insist any more on her presumptuous petition.

"I can't do it, my poor woman," the Lord excused himself. "I have nothing left to give away. Their four favored brothers have carried off everything. Don't cry. Don't break your heart. I shall think it over more carefully. Perhaps I shall find something else. We shall see later on."

But the mother refused to be satisfied.

"Now, Your Majesty! Give them anything now. Who knows when you will return to these parts?

A small gift for each of them. An employment, some occupation. What are my poor children going to do in the world?"

The Archangel was about to order a squad of the divine detachment to carry off the tenacious woman, dragging her, if necessary, when the Lord, in his infinite wisdom, found a solution. He was anxious also to leave the farm and get away from the loathsome rabble.

"The Lord stroked his great silvery beard," explained Uncle Strap, and said, " 'I've got a job for them, my good woman, and it's no easy job. These fellows will wait upon, and work for their brothers for ever and ever.' "

And after a pause, Uncle Strap, wound up as follows:

"You and I and the rest of us, who spend our lives bent over the soil to eke out a miserable existence, are the descendants of those unlucky ones whom our first mother locked up in the stable."

There was a long silence. The reapers seemed to be pondering over the strange tale. Suddenly a voice asked out of the darkness,

"But what about the women?"

Uncle Strap looked around the circle, puzzled and perplexed.

"What women are you talking about?" he asked

querulously. "What have they got to do with the story?"

"Well," the questioner explained, half apologetically. "I can't see how Eve could have boys only. She must have had some girls also. If she had not had any girls, why, there couldn't be any women now, could there? And we have a lot of them, Uncle Strap. I ask: what did she do with her daughters? Did our first mother present any of them to the Lord so that he might give them something, or did she lock them up in the stable?"

A murmur expressive of curiosity, restlessness and expectancy went around the circle, as when the tense silence of an electoral college is broken by an unexpected challenge. All eyes were focused on the old man who looked at the ground and scratched his head with an air of doubt. Suddenly he smiled.

"You can see," he said, suavely, "that the man who asked that question is young and inexperienced. Eve was a woman and knew too well the needs of women to waste any time with useless petitions. The Lord with all his power cannot give women anything after they are born."

There was a long pause. Uncle Strap enjoyed keenly the puzzled silence which followed his remarks.

"Before they are born," he proceeded, exegeti-

cally, "God can give them beauty, charm and, sometimes, he even gives them talent, but after they are in the world, man is their only hope. To him they owe everything. For them is the work of the poor, the power of the ruler, the exploit of the soldier, and the money of the millionaire. They also are the ones who bend with the greatest ease the rigid decrees of justice. No; they need nothing from God. They have enough with man. The only bond between the happy and the unfortunate is that all of us work for women or because of them."

THE CABURÉ FEATHER

Morales was going to fire his Mauser again when his friend Jaramillo, who was sighting his rifle from a kneeling position a few yards away, yelled at the top of his voice to make himself heard above the deafening rattle of the musketry.

"Don't shoot! What would be the use? You can't kill him. That man has a *payé* of great power."

They had landed about midnight near the city wharf. Two river tugs had ferried them across the Paraná. There were more than a hundred of them, a resolute band recruited in Paraguay and the wild Chaco territory, nearly all natives of the state of Corrientes who had gone into exile after some unsuccessful political venture or an affair of the heart which made a change of residence expedient. Mingled with these rebellious sons of Corrientes went a few born fighters, men of the type who love danger for its own sake, a small group of genuine adventurers who prowled around the outlying provinces of the Argentine Republic ready to rush wherever there was the slightest possibility of an uprising against the constituted authorities.

Counting on the incredible audacity of their coup and the shock that their political adversaries were going to receive, they advanced boldly over the streets which converged on the police barracks, marching rapidly, with the confidence of men who tread on familiar ground. The peaceful citizens who were sitting in front of their homes enjoying the cool night air, beat a hasty retreat, realizing the import of this sudden irruption of armed men.

Hardly had the landing party come within pistol-shot of police headquarters, when the doors of the barracks were closed and barred and the guard opened fire on the invaders through the windows. The coup had failed! The enemy had been neither shocked nor surprised. But despite this, the rebels did not think for one moment of fleeing. Just because the attack had failed to surprise the police there was no good reason why they should deprive themselves of the pleasure of exchanging a few shots with the hated adversary.

"Hurrah for Dr. Sepúlveda!" they shouted vociferously. "Down with the usurping government!"

And having relieved their feelings vocally and expressed their opinion about the character of the established government, they fell back in small groups, took positions in the street corners which

faced the square where the police station was located, and began to return the enemy's fire with their Mausers.

A police officer, a stout, dark man, exposed himself in one of the windows with amazing coolness. He would raise his arm and empty his revolver, meanwhile volleying the rebels with an uninterrupted flow of vile language.

"Scoundrels! *Canallas!* Sons of a—barrel! Dogs!" And as soon as he discharged the contents of one revolver, he would change his position and open fire with another, his body filling the entire window-frame and offering an easy target to the assailants. Occasionally he would disappear to reload his weapons, returning almost immediately to continue the fight.

The majority of the rebels seemed to have forgotten the political motive that had brought them there, the "usurping government" and the necessity of capturing the police barracks. Their whole attention was centered on that fat, dark man who insulted them and who took absolutely no precaution to save his own skin. Bullets flew all around him but not a single one seemed to hit the mark.

"Don't waste your cartridges, brother," continued Jaramillo with a fatalistic air. "That man has a talisman, a *payé,* which makes him invulnerable.

He is safe from bullets; the devil himself is not safer. Hum, I should not be surprised if he carries a *caburé* feather around his neck."

Morales ceased firing. He had absolute faith in the wisdom of his comrade. Moreover, since his childhood, he had always known the power of a *caburé* feather.

"Down with Sepúlveda!"

Reinforcements were advancing to support the loyal troops. Shots were now heard in the bottom of the streets. Having recovered from the surprise of the first rush, the government forces had now sized up the situation and were moving very rapidly to relieve the barracks.

"It's all over. We have to retreat," said Jaramillo. And the two friends ran back to the wharf, ducking to escape the bullets with which their enemies were speeding them away. The rest of the band held their ground defending themselves stubbornly.

They reached the waterfront in time to see one of the tugs fast disappearing in the darkness and making its escape up the river, while the other was beginning to cast off. This treachery did not surprise Jaramillo.

"What can you expect from these foreigners, *gringos,* without political faith, men who don't belong to our party! . . . They shouldn't have trusted

those two Italian captains." But he and Morales, with the nimbleness of men bred in the jungle, leaped into the black void and landed on the deck of the fleeing boat. An inch or two more, and they would have plunged into the dark alligator-infested waters.

"May God have mercy on the brave brothers left behind!" sighed Jaramillo.

When the lights of the port began to fade in the distance, Jaramillo, considering himself safe, began to criticize the unsuccessful attack.

"Who ever thought of starting a revolution at midnight when everybody is wide-awake and full of fight? Why, it's absurd. One could pull off a revolution at midnight in a cold climate where people go to bed early. Not here; certainly not. One o'clock in the afternoon—that's the hour for us!"

His hearers nodded their approval.

"During the *siesta,*" Jaramillo went on, "we could have come in and no one would have seen us. It would have been as safe as taking a walk in the cemetery. We could have surprised the *cuartél* and killed the guard. I bet the guard would have been snoring in the shade." After a pause, he continued philosophically. "It is madness to risk a revolution at night in a country like ours. We ought to remember what happens in the jungle."

His audience, composed almost entirely of men bred in the jungle, gave new signs of approval. And

Jaramillo proceeded. "When the sun is overhead and the heat stifling, the jungle sleeps without a shudder or a throb; it sleeps with the appalling silence of the grave. At nightfall, the life of the jungle stirs again; insects buzz, birds flap their wings, quadrupeds stretch their legs, and as the shadows grow thicker, all the animals make preparations to attack or defend themselves, to devour or be devoured. With the coolness of the night, the jungle becomes alive once more and its adventures and tragedies continue."

Morales admired the eloquence and the deep and varied knowledge of his friend. Jaramillo was the son of a wizard and had inherited many of his father's secrets.

"Sometimes," Jaramillo continued with studied oratorical effect, "the night life of the jungle is suddenly paralyzed by a long pause of awesome silence. A terrible hunter is out, prowling through the jungle,—the jaguar, the American tiger, with large, round spots on his coat, whom the Guarani Indians have nicknamed 'the Lord.' Occasionally, however, the silence is caused by something more terrible. A shrill cry pierces the darkness, a fearful screech which makes all those who hear it shudder. This terrible cry is uttered by a bird no larger than my fist, a sort of owlet. All the animals that fly, run or crawl seem to tremble when they hear this screech."

Morales had never been fortunate enough to catch a glimpse of the small and powerful bird, the despot of the jungle; but the fame of this dreaded flier had been a familiar thing to him from early childhood. Two were its weapons: a bill stronger than the best tempered steel and a most devilish cunning. Where its weapon struck, a breach was opened. It always aimed at the head of its enemy, bored through the skull to the brain and sucked the soft mass before its victim could escape. No skull was hard enough to withstand the repeated blows of its drill-like beak. It attacked the wild bull and the tiger and it tackled the tough-skinned alligator despite the armor-like covering which gave it the appearance of an iron-clad.

This diminutive fowl of devilish cunning was the *caburé*.

Morales and Jaramillo owed their names and a few drops of European blood to the Spanish conquerors who had come to their country centuries before; but, in reality, they were two Guarani half-breeds, short in stature, nimble, apparently weak-limbed but possessing amazing powers of endurance to resist fatigue and privations. United by a fraternal friendship, they went to work together on a new railway which the *gringos* were building in their province.

They worked like furies. They tackled their jobs with the vim and set purpose of men who are fight-

ing their mortal enemies to death. The gang bosses recently imported from Europe watched them with sincere admiration.

"And people say that the Indians are lazy . . ." the foreman mused. But on Saturdays, when they received their weekly wages, Morales and Jaramillo would disappear, and their employers and admirers would wait for them in vain the following Monday. They never returned to renew their accursed work until they had spent their last cent in the taverns, drinking and dancing to the tune of an accordion.

When they dressed up, the barefoot, copper-colored belles, attired in white or pink skirts, with their thick braids dangling on their backs, rushed to the doors of their huts to watch them pass by. A brave show they made! Trousers neatly fastened to the ankles with long, thin strips of leather, feet incased in dancing slippers, a nut-brown poncho covering the breast and a red handkerchief around the neck. This last article they deemed the most important detail in their apparel. They might go about in tatters, but without their red handkerchief—never! It was the party emblem, the symbol and battle-flag of the Reds, and a counter to the white handkerchief worn by their rivals.

They carried their swords under their arms; not old swords with wooden handles like those of ordinary *peons* but brand-new blades with glittering

hilts and leather scabbards, similar to those used by the urban police. They had inherited from their remote ancestors of the Conquest an irresistible love for the sword. Firearms were good enough for a revolution, they thought, but the quarrels that grow out of a love affair or a drinking bout should be settled with a clean blade behind the tavern.

Wrapped in their brown ponchos, with the sheathed steel under the arm and the broad brim of their sombreros raised over the eyes, they looked like two caricatures of the *hidalgos* of cloak and sword who had been their illegitimate ancestors.

When the police dropped in to inspect one of the native dances, Morales and Jaramillo hid their swords, thrusting them through their sashes and between the trousers and the skin, a maneuver which forced them to dance with a stiff leg as if they had paralysis.

One day, in one of these dances, Morales, who was less clever than his comrade but far quicker to pick a quarrel, fell out with a certain fellow who insisted on monopolizing the girl that he liked, and ran him through with his sword.

"*No es nada!* Nothing has happened! Go on with the dance!" all shouted.

The man was dead. Nothing, it was nothing! They took out the corpse; you can't dance with a dead body in the way. So out went the victim and

no one need worry. The dead man's relatives would see to it that a little chapel was built for him by the roadside, and every night they would come and light candles for the peace of his soul. A mere incident, something one sees every day.

But the police—the busybodies!—refused to accept the incident with the same philosophical calm, and arrested Morales.

"Political revenge!" protested the half-breed when he found himself behind the bars. "You can see that the usurpers are in power. I am here because I am a Red."

When they took him before the judge and stripped him for the usual search, they found his body covered with ostrich feathers. Jaramillo adorned himself in like manner. They had learned the secret from the wizard, Jaramillo's father. An ostrich feather laid against the skin makes the wearer light and nimble.

The judge was young and full of fun. The strange "bird" provoked a hearty laugh.

"These young doctors who study in Buenos Aires and look down upon the natives," thought Morales, enraged by the hilarity of his Honor, "are an ignorant crew." And after a pause he spoke aloud. "If it hadn't been for these feathers, *doctor,* the other fellow might have killed me. But you see, I got him first. I was quicker."

They took his feathers and his sword away and were going to deprive him of his liberty for a great number of years—the victim happened to be one of those who wore a white handkerchief—when he escaped from jail and took refuge in Paraguay, —the frontier was only a few hours away.

Jaramillo, who did not know what to do during the absence of his friend, decided to follow him, and to justify this flight and match Morales' record, he killed another "white handkerchief" before betaking himself to the neighboring republic.

They applied for work in one of the *yerbales,* the plantations where *maté* is raised—the native tea made popular by the Jesuits long ago when they ruled the theocratic republic of the Missions, founded by them in a territory situated close to the frontiers of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentine.

Anxious to return to their native land, Morales and Jaramillo gave up their work several times to join revolutionary expeditions organized by their party. The great leader of the party, Dr. Sepúlveda, lived peacefully in Buenos Aires waiting for the right opportunity to regenerate his province, while his followers spared no effort to bring about the triumph of his ideals; they started revolutions by night, and revolutions by day, uprisings in the urban centers and uprisings in the country.

The people of Buenos Aires scarcely paid any at-

tention to these exploits and revolutions in the distant province. The Argentine Republic is so large! Moreover, these things took place in one of the remotest corners of the nation, away off in the territory bordering on Brazil and Paraguay, a region which, while politically belonging to Argentine, racially forms a part of Paraguay, for the majority of its inhabitants speak Guarani.

After the bloody failure of that night attack, the two friends returned to the Paraguay plantation to gather *maté*. They were the first consumers of the tea. During the rest hour they would sit by the river bank and, holding in one hand the small gourd stuffed with aromatic leaves of *maté* and filled with hot water, they would suck the delicious drink through a small tube. At such times they spoke in the measured low tones of their native land. Occasionally, the conversation had to do with the elder Jaramillo and his prodigious wisdom.

"I have seen him cure a patient," Morales would bear witness, awed by the reminiscence, "in less time than it takes to say the Creed. He would suck the aching part or he would put his own lips against the lips of the sick person and inhale his breath. And before you could wink he would spit out a worm, a stone, a small snake or a spider. It was the disease; he could draw it out of a sick body quicker than you could uncork a bottle. Some of the patients

died, but they died because they got restless and called in the doctor. That killed them."

"The best of his secrets," Jaramillo, the son, once said, "is the remedy to cure the snake-bite. He revealed it to me just before his death. I value it more than an inheritance of many bags of gold pieces."

"Tell me the secret, brother," Morales implored.

Jaramillo was startled.

"I can't tell you. The secret can be revealed only on Good Friday. If I tell it on some other day I lose the power of healing until the following Good Friday."

But Morales began to bother his friend with childish persistence and gave him no rest for weeks and weeks. He remembered vividly how on a certain occasion one of his neighbors had returned to his ranch with an arm swollen and black from a snake-bite. The elder Jaramillo had applied certain strong remedies to the poisoned limb, mumbling immediately a mysterious invocation over the body of the snake, clubbed to death after its felonious attack on the ranchman.

"You are not a real friend," Morales said with sadness. "I treat you like a brother and yet you have secrets which you won't share with me."

Jaramillo did not want to be rendered powerless just to satisfy the whim of his friend.

"Suppose one of those poisonous reptiles bites you when you go barefoot in the *yerbal?*" Jaramillo argued.

"No danger," replied Morales with assurance. "Remember that you gave me a pair of garters made of owl-skin, and poisonous snakes flee from my feet when they scent the skin."

Finally, one afternoon, Jaramillo gave in and sacrificed himself for his friendship.

"You insist on knowing . . . Well . . ." and closing his eyes, he revealed the great secret. "All you have to do is to bend over the dead snake and say in low tones: 'Thou art no snake; thou art a cricket!' Immediately the poison in the body of the victim loses its venomous quality."

"Is that all?" asked Morales, visibly disappointed. "Is that all there is to it?"

That was all. But the magic words must be spoken in Guarani. The snakes, natives of Paraguay, cannot understand Spanish, the language of Buenos Aires.

"And now," Jaramillo said wth a touch of sadness, "I'll have to wait until next Good Friday."

Soon after that Jaramillo began to make frequent trips to Asunción, the capital of Paraguay. His friend, intrigued by these strange visits, forced him to confess.

"I have seen him!" said Jaramillo mysteriously.

Although he did not give the name of the being he had seen, the tone of his voice was sufficient to enable Morales to guess.

It was the *caburé!*

The two friends spoke of the bird frequently. Ah, if they could only get a *caburé* feather and make themselves invulnerable, and, consequently, the bravest men on earth! The elder Jaramillo himself, despite his remarkable lore, had not been able to capture a *caburé.* It was extremely difficult to get hold of one of these birds. That was why the younger Jaramillo kept on repeating with pride: "I have seen him as close as I am seeing you."

The owner of the *caburé* was a *gringo* who lived in Asunción for no other purpose than to study the plants and the animals of the republic, a fat, ruddy-cheeked, fair-haired German doctor who wore gold-rimmed spectacles and was very fond of jesting with the simple-minded folk of the countryside to get all the information he could out of them. In the *patio* of his home, large as a conventual cloister, he had a rich collection of birds and quadrupeds, and in a cage in the center, lording it over this small and restless world, which it could silence with a mere cry, hung the *caburé.*

On several occasions the doctor had found Jara-

millo standing outside the front door watching the precious bird through the grating and had asked him in to see the specimen.

"What a beauty, eh?" the doctor would remark with pride and satisfaction. "I paid more than its weight in gold for it. Very few of these birds are ever caught alive. It is a rare good fortune to own one."

A very costly specimen secured at a great sacrifice! But the doctor did not regret it when he thought of the eight hundred page volume he was going to write about the *caburé* and its habits, a book that would surely bring him prizes from several learned societies.

Both friends hit upon the same idea: to steal the prodigious bird or, at least, to pluck a few feathers from its tail.

They had to raid the *gringo's* house, and for this the most suitable time was the *siesta* hour. Jaramillo loved the witching hour of the *siesta!* It was the safest one!

"Morales," he told his friend, "you stay outside; and watch the door; I may need you. One never can tell what may happen. That accursed *gringo* may take a notion to scream; I may have to kill him." He shrugged his shoulders. "One life less—it matters little."

After scaling the wall of one of the back *patios*,

Jaramillo let himself into the house, noiselessly and, in his barefeet, glided down the cool corridors like a phantom. As he slunk past a door, he heard the sputtering gurgle of a guttural, strong-lunged sleeper. The German doctor, in his anxiety to conform to the customs of the country, had adopted the *siesta* habit.

Once in the main *patio,* the half-breed made straight for the central cage, which had been placed in the midst of a circular row of bushes covered with red, fine-pointed flowers of enormous size, called in the language of the country "federal stars."

There was the famous "beast," a sort of pigmy red owl with short, curved feet! Man and beast glared at each other as if they were going to join in mortal combat. The bird's eyes, of a rich golden hue with a black head in the center, shot daggers at the man, but the steady gaze of the human being made them waver and drop as if overcome by a stronger will.

Jaramillo was in no mood to waste time. With a quick jerk he pulled off the padlock and opened the cage, thrusting in his right hand to grab the bird. Despite his determination to make no noise, he could not suppress a cry of pain.

"You son of a she-devil!" he groaned.

One of his fingers was lanced clean through. More than an ordinary wound, it was like a poniard-

thrust or the cruel boring of a red-hot gimlet. Overcoming the pain, he closed his bleeding hand to capture his enemy. He felt an irresistible impulse to choke the little beast, and at the same time he was fearful of crushing it to death, for the *caburé* feather loses all its miraculous powers if it is not taken from the living bird.

With his free hand Jaramillo plucked the *caburé's* tail feathers, and the bird uttered its blood-curdling screech making a second thrust at the audacious hand that gripped it. The terrifying shriek was followed by deep silence. All the animals in the *patio* became mute and hid in the deepest recesses of their cages. Life seemed to cease in the entire neighborhood.

The half-breed, unable to endure the pain in his wounded hand, had dropped the *caburé* and fled toward the door. And the bird, seeing the cage open, had come out of it as if it intended to pursue its enemy, but upon second thought it had changed its mind and escaped first to the eaves, finally disappearing.

Jaramillo unfastened the latch of the front door grating and got out in the street. His faithful friend Morales was waiting for him. He carried no sword. This expedition called for short weapons, but under the poncho his right hand caressed the handle of a knife, ready for any emergency.

"What's the matter, brother?" asked Morales

when he saw Jaramillo's bleeding hand. "Who wounded you?"

Jaramillo shrugged his shoulders with a gesture of indifference and instead of replying showed his friend three or four feathers which he carried in his wounded hand.

From that afternoon on, the life of the two comrades changed radically. Jaramillo had to go to a quack, an old friend of his father, for immediate treatment. The wounded finger had turned black and it had to be amputated to keep the poisonous pollution from reaching the heart. The native medicine-man sharpened on a stone the knife he used indiscriminately to scrape the mud from his horse and to slice bread. The operation was painful but Jaramillo gathered courage and fortitude to endure it by looking at the little bag which he carried around his neck. The *caburé* feathers were in that bag. Well could he afford to suffer a little pain in exchange for such a wonderful talisman!

Morales was sad and spoke with the humility of one who wishes to make a petition and hesitates to speak, embarrassed by the importance of the favor desired. He finally decided to speak.

"Brother, why don't you give me one of the feathers? We have always shared everything, as if we had been born of the same mother. You have three feathers; you don't lose anything by giving

me one. You will be equally powerful with the other two. One is enough to make you invulnerable."

But although Jaramillo had never gone to school, he knew that three was more than two, and he figured that if he kept the three feathers, his might would be all the greater. Moreover, he did not think that it was right that Morales, whose hands were whole, should try to acquire an equal power. He preferred to have his friend under the dominion of his superiority.

And, surely enough, Morales began to feel the bondage. His friend had become a despot. Jaramillo loafed all day and made him do his work for him; frequently, the tyrant went so far as to ask Morales to hand over his hard-earned wages; and on one occasion he took from him a certain Paraguay belle of fair complexion and arrogant figure who had shown marked predilection for Morales.

"I shall have to kill him," Morales began to think. "We can't live together any more."

But he had to abandon at once his evil plan. Impossible to kill Jaramillo as long as he had in his possession the talisman, the little bag with the *caburé* feathers, which made him invulnerable!

And the despot, encouraged by the fatalistic resignation of his friend, carried his audacity to more intolerable extremes. One day he beat Morales be-

cause the latter did not obey him instantly, and when he found that his daring had not brought him to grief, he gave his friend another whipping.

"What won't he dare to do with those feathers on his breast!" Morales pondered.

Jaramillo had lost all fear of man or beast. In a country tavern he had fought against five of the bravest Paraguayans and had come out of the brawl victorious and unhurt. He went swimming every day despite the fact that none of the laborers of the *maté* plantation would risk a plunge in the river lest they should encounter "Grandpa."

This "Grandpa" was an alligator famous for its size from the River Plate to the headwaters of the Paraná. The old men of the country, who can tell the age of an alligator, calculated that "Grandpa" had been floating on the river for the past four centuries. In its verdant youth it might have gazed upon the square-rigged caravels with lions and castles painted on their sails in which the Spaniards first navigated the magnificent fluvial system of the Rio Plata.

"Look at 'Grandpa'!" the *peons* would yell. And they would point at an enormous gnarled trunk, covered with green moss, lying on the muddy shore of a near-by island, like a dead tree brought down by the current.

As the last Paraguay revolution had provided the

entire countryside with rifles, the *peon's* cry was usually the signal for a general fusillade against the famous centenarian. Some sharpshooters managed to hit its back. A useless task. The bullets struck off a few splinters from its mail but the gigantic lizard scarcely budged, as if the bullets did not tickle it enough to disturb its rest. If the hunters, tired of wasting ammunition, tried to get near it in a boat, then it would lazily sink to the bottom of the river, leaving behind a circle of yellowish foam.

As a child, Morales had gone swimming in waters infested by *yacarés,* but these alligators were as young, tender and inexperienced as he was. The terrible ones are the old brutes, nicknamed *cebados* because they have eaten human flesh. After having once tasted this delicacy, they never lose their appetite for it. And "Grandpa" had passed through his stomach so many generations of human beings!

When Jaramillo went bathing, Morales, out of regard for their old friendship, never failed to offer a word of warning. "Look out for Grandpa!" But the invulnerable despot gave no heed to his friend's exhortation. With bold strokes he would swim out to the middle of the river to get into deep waters. Why should he worry about a decrepit alligator, older than the discovery of America!

On a certain Sunday, Morales was sitting on the river bank smoking a Paraguayan cigar which sent

two streams of nicotine down his chin, when Jaramillo jumped into the water for his daily swim. From his point of vantage, Morales saw an enormous black object moving just below the surface with the velocity of a torpedo at right angles to the direction of the swimmer.

"Grandpa," he said. "It cannot be anything else." Jaramillo made desperate efforts to get away from the ferocious centenarian. He uttered a wild shriek and disappeared as if he had been pulled down by an irresistible force.

Morales was far more disconcerted and overwhelmed by the utter absurdity of the tragedy than by the death of his friend. The beliefs of a lifetime wavered, shaken to their very foundations. It was enough to destroy a man's faith. "No, it cannot be possible," he said repeatedly. "Jaramillo has a talisman. Jaramillo cannot die."

Instinctively, he went to the place where the swimmer had taken off his clothes. A smile of conviction, of restored happiness, lighted up his face.

"I thought so!"

The bag containing the irresistible talisman, the wonderful *payé,* was lying on top of the clothes. Through carelessness or for some other reason unknown to Morales, the victim had removed it before plunging into the river.

Thereupon, Morales thought that there must be a

Providence, as the Mission *padres* used to assure him. Then he wondered whether that wise old *yacaré,* as ancient as the river itself, was not some mysterious divinity whose duty it was to avenge the humble.

And without hesitation, he took the little bag containing the marvelous *payé* and hung it around his neck with the air of a ruler who was putting on his head the crown of the world.

Fortune smiled on him at once.

Quite unexpectedly, his party returned to power. They, who had launched so many unsuccessful revolutions, regained control of the government in the most peaceful and prosaic manner. Doctor Sepúlveda had managed to get the Federal Government to send a commission from Buenos Aires to investigate the administration of his adversaries. This investigation brought to light—as it generally happens—certain irregularities which caused the downfall of the government.

Morales returned to his native country with the halo and the arrogance of a political martyr. The great party leader, now governor of the province, shook hands with him, and the half-breed was moved to tears.

"I know you, my hero," the great man greeted him. "You are one of the survivors of that unfor-

getable night. Few remain . . . What can I do for you?"

Morales did not want much reward. He only aspired to become a policeman. Ah, for long years he had endured the blows of his adversaries. He now wanted to taste the joy of giving.

And so his old friends found him again one day in the streets of his native city wearing shoes—a terrible torment!—a blue frock-coat with gilt buttons and a white English helmet. No longer did he carry his sword under his arm or hidden under his trousers; he carried it by his side like the military and the authorities who represent law and order and have a right to use force.

He had tremendous and instant success not unmixed with glory. The province had no braver policeman. What could frighten a person who wore on his breast a talisman of *caburé* feathers! . . . Whenever there was a particularly dangerous job, his chief always gave the same order: "Send for Morales."

And Morales never failed them. Law-breakers might draw their guns in taverns or dance halls to resist the authorities. Useless! Before they could pull the trigger—paff!—the half-breed had sent the weapon flying with a quick blow of his dexterous hand. Sometimes they had managed to shoot at him

but the bullets had only pierced his helmet or grazed certain superfluous parts of his uniform without as much as touching the flesh. And he would come out of these trials smiling and unmoved as if they were routine matters of no consequence.

Moreover, the conviction that he was invulnerable gave him great impetus in a fight. Not having to worry about his own defense, he concentrated all his faculties on the attack, and there was no hand more energetic or nimble than his. If any prisoner refused to obey him, he rued his mistake, for the half-breed, once aroused, would suddenly convert himself into a whole troop of Morales. The prisoner would receive a blow with the flat of the officer's sword, say, on his left side, and when he turned on his heels to escape, paff! there was another Morales beating him on the right, and a third Morales hitting him over the head, and a fourth Morales striking him on the legs, and between the legs; in short, the man had to give up and beg for mercy.

The bravest in the Province began to talk about him with a certain fear, guessing his secret. "It is useless to attempt anything against this person. He must own a *payé*."

His superiors would have made him a commanding officer, but he could not read or write, so he was given the rank of corporal. Thereupon Morales

deemed that his new dignity demanded a facial appendage, and he allowed a few straggling hairs which grew on his copper-colored face to assume the shape of a moustache.

On special market days, the countrywomen who rode to town astride their small, hairy ponies, did not conceal their admiration for the celebrated policeman. They called him *Don* Morales, prefixing to the surname a title which is used only with the Christian name. The sight of the hero made them turn pale with emotion and they tried to attract his attention with coquettish flashes of their slanting eyes.

One morning while on patrol duty in the market place, *Don* Morales ran across a certain *gringo,* a corpulent, strong, red-haired fellow, whom he had met years before in Paraguay.

"*Don* Macpherson," he exclaimed. "What a surprise! How goes it with you?"

They embraced each other. Morales looked down upon the *gringo*; he despised all foreigners; and yet he inwardly admitted that for Macpherson he felt great admiration. His contempt was due to Macpherson's ignorance of Guarani and very limited knowledge of Spanish—unquestionable evidences, in Morale's judgment, of the foreigner's mental inferiority. Moreover, in common with all *gringos,* Macpherson had enormous feet and wore shoes as

large as river barges, an inevitable sign of plebeian origin in a country where men were noted for their small, ladylike feet and high insteps.

On the other hand, Morales admired Macpherson because the latter could sit at a table for a whole day and night and empty one bottle after another without getting up—or falling down—during the entire session. And his eloquence—no preacher could excel him when he started to expatiate on the curative virtues of whiskey, the panacea for all the misfortunes and ills that plague humanity.

The half-breed even knew his manias. When the *gringo* had had a glass or two, he got angry if any one called him an Englishman.

"Mi no ser inglés!" he would protest in his atrocious Spanish. *"Mi ser escocés!"* It amused Morales hugely that a drunken Englishman became a Scotchman, all by virtue of the extraordinary powers of whiskey.

Macpherson had lived in South America for a good many years. He had been an emerald hunter in Colombia, a silver miner in Peru, a tin miner in Bolivia, a nitrate exporter in Chile, a cattleman in the Argentine, a *maté* dealer in Paraguay, and a famous drunkard everywhere. Sometimes he had been the owner of the business, frequently just a subordinate employee. He had had his ups and downs, giving generously to-day and soliciting a small loan to-morrow to get out of the country.

Now—as he explained to Morales—he was buying young steers for a Uruguayan concern that manufactured liquid meat for children and weak adults. This liquid meat made him smile contemptuously. Liquid meat, with so much good whiskey in the world! . . .

Morales hesitated. His uniform! He, the representative of authority, should not set foot in a tavern except to impose the law and restore order. But one look at the *gringo* dispelled his official scruples. An old comrade! . . .

"Listen *Don* Macpherson," he said, "suppose we go in and have a glass of something!"

They went into one of the market taverns and the proprietor, out of regard for Morales, gave them a table in the back part of the *patio*. The tavern-keeper had no whiskey but he served his guests a brand of gin that drew high praise from the foreigner.

"Drink, *Don*," said the policeman, "drink all you want. You know I like Englishmen very much, and now that I am somebody in my country . . "

"Mi no ser inglés," protested Macpherson, *"Mi ser escocés."*

Morales remembered his friend's weakness.

"Very well, *Don* Macpherson," he explained with a generous wave of his hands. "I love Scotchmen very much, also."

And after this, the half-breed began to speak

about his exploits and the respectful, awed estimation in which he was held by all of the community. He seemed anxious to impress the foreigner with his importance and to receive from him the approval and homage due to a hero of his caliber.

"I know all about it," said Macpherson.

The *gringo* had heard a great deal about Corporal Morales, and he showed his amazement with a frankness and sincerity which deeply humiliated the hero. It was a mystery to the hard-headed Scot how that undersized and underfed youth whose frailness was visible to the naked eye could possibly intimidate any one. And from the towering height of his own solid corpulence he looked down upon the puny "terror" and examined him with mock curiosity; felt his muscles with his huge hands, and smiled ironically at the thinness of the biceps.

At this point a reminiscence which suddenly flashed across Macpherson's memory made his smile more insolent. The *gringo* saw himself in a *yerbal,* a few years back. Morales was his *peón.* They had a dispute over something and the *peón* drew his sword. Macpherson knocked the weapon out of his hands and proceeded to thrash him, beating him into insensibility.

By a phenomenon of mental sympathy, Morales recalled the same incident simultaneously but with a second act. He saw himself at nightfall lying down

in a *maté* field waiting for the *gringo* who had knocked him out. The *gringo* was going to spend the night in Asunción. He passed by the field and Morales shot and wounded him seriously. The Scotchman stayed in bed for several weeks and when he recovered, decided to quit the country, convinced that it was not advisable to have disputes with copper-colored people.

The men looked at each other

"Morales a famous man! I find you a hero!"

"My dear *Don* Macpherson! I wonder why I like you so much!"

And they shook hands over the gin jug, now almost empty.

But they no longer looked at each other with the same cordiality. The evil memory of the past had opened a gulf between them.

The half-breed seemed bound to have the other fellow admire him. All the gin that he had drunk boiled in his stomach when the conviction began to dawn on him that the *gringo* did not believe a word about his bravery and considered all his exploits mere lies.

In Buenos Aires the Scotchman had picked up a Spanish word that irritated Morales. Whenever any one told him unreliable stories, Macpherson shrugged his shoulders and said contemptuously:

"Macañas! Nonsense! Nothing but *macañas!"*

Morales was convinced that the objectionable word was echoing in Macpherson's mind at that very moment. The wonderful feats of valor of Corporal Morales—*macañas,* nothing but *macañas!*

The ardent wish of winning the foreigner's admiration made him humble himself and reveal his secret.

"See here, *Don* Scotchman," he explained, "if I am a brave man, I don't deserve much credit. Even if I wanted to be a coward, I couldn't be. I have a most powerful *payé,* I carry on my breast three *caburé* feathers. You are almost one of us; you know this country; you know what it means to carry *caburé* feathers. There is no man or beast that can do anything to me."

"Macañas! . . . Nothing but *macañas!"*

The terrible word was out! The halfbreed turned green with rage when the other fellow gave him the lie so contemptuously.

"But didn't I tell you I have a *payé?* Look at it. You are the first man I've shown it to," protested Morales, exasperated. And he unbuttoned his frock-coat and shirt displaying the small leather bag, grimy with perspiration, which hung on his breast.

"Macañas! . . . Macañas!" the foreigner repeated, finishing the bottle of gin and beginning another one.

Thoroughly aroused, Morales spoke of his unfor-

tunate comrade Jaramillo, of the German doctor, of the *caburé,* of the alligator nicknamed "Grandpa." He told the whole story in vain; Macpherson remained unmoved.

The half-breed got up. The *gringo* might have his doubts about the virtue of Morales' own mother, without hurting their friendship. After all, he wasn't quite sure who his father was; the natives frequently omit the ceremony of marriage on account of the red tape and expense connected with it. But to express doubts about his talisman! To consider his story false! Really, this was more than he could patiently bear.

"Listen here, *Don* Englishman!"

The Scotchman was going to protest against the term "Englishman," but his lips were sealed by amazement when he realized that the error was deliberate and that Morales intended it as an insult.

"Listen here, *Don* Englishman," the exasperated half-breed repeated. "Let's make a trial."

He had drawn a double-barreled pistol of enormous caliber from one of his trouser pockets. Morales always carried two sets of weapons; one official, exposed to view, and another concealed, for special service. He offered it to the foreigner, who accepted it mechanically. Macpherson was now facing Morales, with an angry look on his face.

"I could kill you if I wanted to and you couldn't

do a thing to me . . ." explained Morales. "But I won't take advantage. I want you to see with your own eyes. I hope that tough, ox-like head of yours will soften up a little, enough to let in a grain of common sense . . . Shoot!"

With both hands he pulled back his shirt showing the bare chest and the marvelous little bag.

"Don't worry, *gringo,*" he said, taunting his adversary, "shoot; I ask you to fire!"

Macpherson, despite his drunkenness, realized the absurdity of the proposition. The half-breed had gone mad, he thought, and in his devilish self-conceit was making fun of him.

"You are afraid to shoot," Morales continued, aggravatingly. "That's right; the bullet might rebound from my chest and hurt you. Don't take a chance. Stand farther back and a little to the side so that the bullet can't touch you."

But Macpherson, as if he did not understand these recommendations, raised his arm to a horizontal position and took aim.

"See here," he said at last, threateningly. "Cut out your horse-play or I'll shoot."

All considerations were now thrown to the winds. The two men faced each other like enemies.

"Shoot, you accursed *gringo,*" hissed Morales. "Shoot so that you may convince yourself. You won't believe I have a *payé*—shoot and find out for yourself!"

"Better be careful," repeated the other, more angrily, "or I'll shoot."

"Shoot and be damned . . . You are no Scotchman; you are a . . . "

He could not finish the phrase.

"Have it your own way!" And the *gringo* pulled the two triggers at once.

A white cloud spread before his eyes.

When the smoke had cleared and the sound of the double explosion died away, he saw Morales lying at his feet with outstretched arms and torn breast. A frozen smile of haughty self-confidence was his last gesture.

THE SERENADE

I

A sleepy Spanish town of the Valencian *ribera*—Benimuslín. White walls and dark roofs, perching above a sea of olive trees and vineyards. A church belfry with red tiles. A Moorish town with crumbling, time-worn battlements. Benimuslín! A village like all the villages of Spain—backward, dull, unchanging, picturesque—the habitat of prejudice and tradition, of burning passions and undying hatreds. Simple folk, indifferent to the great world and its doings, absorbed in their own loves and spites and competitive ambitions. Benimuslín—the home of Marieta, of Toni *el Desgarrat,* of *tío* Sento—and a few thousand others like them.

II

Tío Sento, "Uncle" Sento, had announced his intentions. He was getting married for the second time.

To understand the commotion this piece of news occasioned in Benimuslín, you must know that the

widower *tío* Sento was the leading citizen, the biggest tax-payer, in the locality; and further that his bride-to-be was Marieta, the village beauty, but the daughter of a teamster. Her dowry? A bewitching brown face; a pair of black eyes sparkling like gems under long lashes; and ringlets of shining coal-black hair, drawn down across her temples by pretty side combs.

Now Benimuslín could not recover from its surprise, and its anger. Everyone said the same thing. A man his age marrying a chit of a girl like that! What was the world coming to? There was *tío* Sento, owner of half of the real estate in town, with a hundred barrels of wine in his cellar and five mules in his barn! And who was to get all that? Not a girl from a good family, but a piece of rubbish from the sidewalks—Marieta, the teamster's daughter, who had stolen for a living as a little thing, and now grown up, was glad to do housework for the meals there were in it! And how about *siñá* Tomasa, *tío* Sento's first wife? She had given him the homestead in the *Calle Mayor,* and her farm lands. She had even fitted up the bedroom with all that furniture she had been so proud of, when she was alive. Would she not turn over in her grave to think of it going to a waif of the streets to whom she had so often given a meal in the kitchen, out of pure Christian charity?

Fifty-six years old, and marrying for love! Was the old fool a regular satyr? See the way he danced time to every word she said, wearing a silly smile on his face, and showing an unhealthy gleam in his small gray eyes that were just visible under his thick bushy eyebrows!

Benimuslín concluded after a week's discussion that *tío* Sento had lost his mind. The Sunday when the bans were read in church, there was almost a riot. Some of the men folks of *siñá* Tomasa's family were there. And how they cursed, after mass was over! Talk about your thieves, sir! Tomasa willed all that property to her husband, very well! But she understood that he would never forget her, that he would always be faithful to her memory. And what was the old rascal doing? Passing it all over to another woman—and a young one like that! And he fifty-six! No, there was no justice on earth if such things went on! Sue him, to get the dowry back? Lots of good that would do! The courts were not to be trusted these days, as don Vicente, the rector, said. If don Carlos were in power, then . . . perhaps!

So those who considered themselves directly injured by the proposed match grumbled at the cafes in the Square; and so everybody grumbled, not excluding the girls of the wealthier families, who would willingly have tendered their fair young hands to

the decrepit Shylock and now could not bear to see his fortune going to a waif.

The whole town knew, moreover, that Marieta had a lover. Toni *el Desgarrat,* Toni "Rags" in other words, had been a vagrant like her as a little boy; and now, a loafer about the wine-shops, he still loved her "with the best of intentions." In fact, the two good-for-nothings had been postponing marriage only until "Rags" should develop a taste for work and leave the company he was keeping. For Toni's boon companion and bosom friend was Dimoni, a clarinet player from a neighboring town, who came in to see him at least once a week, to celebrate a grand spree in some tavern and then sleep it off afterwards in somebody's barn.

The relatives of *siñá* Tomasa suddenly took a liking to "Rags." In the town loafer they saw a possible avenger of their wrongs. And other people too, people of the better sort, people who had never stooped to speak to him in their lives, now sought him out in his favorite drinking place.

"How's this, *Desgarrat?*" they asked banteringly. "They say Marieta's getting married!"

"Rags" hitched about on his stool, stroked the flashy cloak he had thrown across his knees, transferred his cigar butt to the other corner of his mouth, and gazed for a moment at the glass of red wine in front of him.

Finally he shrugged his shoulders.

"So they say! . . . Well, we'll see about it, *recordons!* The old man had better not brag, till he comes home with the bacon."

That is why everybody was sure something interesting would soon be happening. For *tío* Sento was all a man himself, a man among the best of them. He had his say around election time. He had a "pull" with the Governor at Valencia. He had been mayor several times. More than once, in the open Square he had raised his heavy cane and beaten bigger fellows than he was, just because he found them in his way.

He would take no nonsense from Toni *el Desgarratt,* the whole town was sure of that, and Benimuslín looked forward to an exciting time.

III

Tío Sento, indeed, never did things half way. That was obvious when the day for signing the marriage contract came. Since his bride lacked a dowry, he gave her one himself—three hundred *onzas* gold, if you please, not counting the wedding dress, the rings, the combs, and the furniture that had belonged to *siñá* Tomasa! The girls of the village flocked in company to Marieta's place—a wretched

shack, with a cart in the front yard and three underfed nags in the stable, where her father, the teamster, lived, out beyond the last house on the road to Valencia. And holding hands, or their arms about each other's waists, they walked around the big table in the front room, where all her wedding presents were on display.

Reina y santíssima, how many pretty things! Towels, tablecloths, handkerchiefs, bandanas, underclothing, skirts, silk and linens, worked with monograms and arabesques, and arranged in piles, according to sizes, that almost reached the ceiling! All the friends and the dependents of *tío* Sento were remembering the happy pair. Among no end of dishes, and silver-plated knives and forks, and the porcelain holy-water fonts that lesser people had donated to the bridal chamber, were two handsome candlesticks from the Marquis—the *cacique,* the political boss of the District—the greatest man in Spain, *tío* Sento called him—for whom, moreover, he was ever ready to wield his cane or level his shotgun, when it came to returning the Marquis as Deputy to Parliament. On a shelf, in the most conspicuous place in the room, were the bride's jewels, two pearl earrings, a number of brooches with complicated pendants, gold side-combs, three long pins with pearl-set tops for the back hair, and the gold chain, so much talked of in Benimuslín, because

siñá Tomasa had paid fourteen doubloons for it at a big store in the capital!

"Talk about your luck!" But Marieta blushed modestly at all the jealous congratulations heaped upon her for her great catch; while her mother a sickly over-worked and now aged peasant woman, wept great tears of silent embarrassment; and the teamster trotted effusively back and forth in the trail of *tío* Sento, finding no words humble enough and grateful enough for the munificence of his future son-in-law.

The contract was to be read and signed at the teamster's house that night. Don Julian, the notary, accompanied by his secretary, drove up, about sundown, in his two-wheeled cart, a portable writing-set sticking out of his pocket, and a roll of stamped official paper under his arm.

A special table, lighted by a four-armed candlestick, had been set up in the kitchen, and the notary strode in in triumph. What a learned, what an impressive, representative of the law! Don Julian read his texts in dialect, peppering the highflown legal phrases with side remarks of his own. Just try to keep your face straight in the presence of that joker, who looked like a priest with his long black coat and his puffy clean-shaven face! And what were those glasses for, if he always wore them high up on his forehead?

As the notary dictated and dictated, his scribe wrote and wrote, the pen scratching noisily on the rough stamped paper. Meanwhile the curate, and friends of the two families were coming in. The wedding presents had been removed from the table in the front room, and in their places, cakes and sweetmeats had appeared, tarts and bitter almonds, and bottle after bottle of cordials—rose and maraschino.

"Ahem! Ahem! Ahem!" Don Julian cleared his throat several times, rose from his seat, smoothed the flaps of his long coat, pulled it down in front by the lapels, and picked up the pages of writing in front of him. Grains of sand, from the fresh pages, dropped upon the table.

And what a case he was! When he came to the bridegroom's name he twisted his face into a grotesque scowl that *tío* Sento was the first to applaud with a great burst of laughter. When he came to Marieta's, he stepped aside from the table to make room, delivered a deep bow in imitation of an old-fashioned gallant in the ballroom; and again everybody laughed. But when he began on the terms of the contract—doubloons, vineyards, houses, fields, horses, mules—avarice and jealousy painted those rustic faces dark. *Tío* Sento was the only one to smile—satisfied that all those people should know how rich and powerful he was, and how handsomely

he was treating his chosen woman. Marieta's parents were unable to restrain their tears. Generous was no name for it! And their neighbors nodded assent. Yes, you could trust your daughter to a man like that, and be sure of yourself!

After the formalities of signature were over, the refreshments passed around. Don Julian paraded the best of his well-known stock of jests and stories, maliciously nudging don Vicente, the curate, in the ribs, and facetiously planning with that austere ascetic a terrible debauch for the wedding day.

At eleven o'clock everything was over. The curate went home scandalized at his own remissness in having stayed awake so late. The mayor left with him. At last *tío* Sento rose with the notary and the secretary. He had invited them to pass the remainder of the night at his house.

The road beyond Marieta's cabin was dark, dark as the open country on a moonless night is dark. Above the houses toward the town the stars were sparkling in the deep blue of the sky. Some dogs were barking in the barnyards. The village itself was quite asleep.

The notary and his companions picked their way cautiously onward, to avoid stumbling over the stones in those unknown roads. *"Ave Maria purísima!"* called a hoarse voice in the distance.

"Eleven o'clock—and all is well!" The *sereno,* the night watchman, was going his rounds.

Don Julian felt a sense of uneasiness creeping over him in that inky darkness. He thought he saw suspicious signs of life at the corner of the street leading down toward Marieta's house. Some one seemed to be watching her door.

"Look out, look out!"

There was an explosion, followed by a rasping, hissing sound. From the corner a thick stream of fire seemed to dart outward through the air, wriggling, twisting, in rapid flight, while the notary's hair stood on end.

A rocket, a rocket! There was a joke for you! The notary flattened against the door of a house, his assistant groveling in terror at his feet. The ball of fire struck the wall above his head, rebounded to the other side of the street, then from the house there back again, emitting a shrill whistle on each leg of its journey, till finally it exploded with a deafening bang.

Tío Sento had stopped unperturbed in the middle of the street.

"Redeu! God and God again! I know who did that! You filthy jail-bird!"

And with his heavy cane ready to strike, he made for the corner, certain that around it he would find

el Desgarrat, with all the gang of his first wife's relatives!

IV

The bells of Benimuslín had been ringing since break of day.

The news of *tío* Sento's approaching wedding had reached the limits of the District; and from every hand friends and relatives were coming in, some riding their workhorses with gay-colored cloaks for saddle cloths, others in wagons, their families perched on stools along the cart-sides.

Tío Sento's house, where no one had had a moment's rest for near on a week, was a center of noisy hustling activity. The best women cooks in the neighborhood for miles around had been marshalled for the glad occasion, and were going to and fro in kitchen and yard, their sleeves rolled up, their skirts caught up behind, showing the white petticoats underneath. Piles and piles of faggots had been heaped up within easy reach of the fires. The village butcher was slaughtering hens in the back-yard, where the ground was literally carpeted with feathers. *Tía* Pascuala, the old servant in the house, was opening chickens, extracting the livers, hearts and gizzards to make the tastiest sauces and tidbits of the

feast. What a thing it was to have money! All the arriving guests, poor farmers for the most part, condemned year in year out to frugal living off the soil, could feel their mouths water at the prospect of one whole day of abundant cheer.

Such an array of eatables had never been seen in all the history of Benimuslín. In one corner was a pile of fresh bread as big as a cord of wood. There was pan after pan of mountain snails stewing on the big stove. A huge tin box of spices was sitting in the cupboard. Wine-skins were being brought up by the dozen from the cellars—the large ones with red wine for the meal, the smaller filled with that white liquid fire from *tío* Sento's famous "corner barrel," that had proved too much for the strongest drinkers in the district. As for confetti—they were there by the basketful—balls of sugar and starch as hard as bullets; and as *tío* Sento gleefully surveyed the animated scene, he had thought with cruel anticipation of the lumps those missiles would raise on the heads of the youngsters who would be on hand for the scramble.

Yes, things were getting along fine! Everything was ready! Everybody was turning out. Even Dimoni, the clarinet-player, had come in before time—for *tío* Sento, sparing no expense to make the day a grand one, had thought of the music and

ordered that Dimoni be kept well supplied with drink; for, as everyone knew, he played much better when half-seas-over.

The bells of the church stopped ringing. The time for the ceremony was at hand. The nuptial procession marched to the home of the bride, the women in their best full-skirted dresses, the men in their gala cloaks with long blue capes, and in high starched collars that chafed their ears. From Marieta's home they started back toward the church. First came a troop of boys capering and turning handsprings around Dimoni, who was playing with his head thrown back and his instrument up in the air as if it were a prolongation of his nose through which he was sniffing at the sky. Next came the bridal couple, *tío* Sento in a new velvet hat, a long-sleeved coat, too tight about the waist, embroidered stockings and brand new sandals; Marieta—oh Marieta! *Reina y siñora,* how pretty she looked! A *siñoreta* from Valencia could not have done better! She had an expensive lace mantilla; a Manila shawl with long fringes; silk skirt puffed out by four or five petticoats; a pearl rosary in her hand; a huge plaque of gold for a brooch; and in her ears the splendid pearls that *siñá* Tomasa had worn in her time!

The whole town was waiting in front of the church—even some of *siñá* Tomasa's relatives, who

had been carried away by their curiosity and come along in spite of the clan's decision to boycott the ceremony. They kept in the background, however, standing on tiptoe to look on as the parade marched by.

"Thief! Thief! Ten times a thief!" One of the offended family had spied *siñá* Tomasa's earrings in the ears of the bride. But *tío* Sento only smiled with what seemed to be satisfaction. And the company entered the church.

The spectators who remained outside turned their eyes toward the tavern across the Square. Dimoni, the clarinet-player, had made off in that direction, as if the church organ were offering him an unwelcome competition. But who had joined him there? Toni *el Desgarratt*—"Rags," and some of his rowdy friends! The lot of them went to one of the tables, and sat there exchanging winks and smiles. All the undesirables in the town! Something surely was going on! And the women began to whisper and talk mysteriously!

But look! They were coming out of the church again! Dimoni got up from his table on the sidewalk and went back across the Square, striking up the Royal March! All the ragamuffins in Christendom seemed to have come to life from somewhere and gathered around the entrance. *"Armeles! confits!"* "Almonds! Almonds! Give us our sweets!"

"Almonds, eh? Candy, eh?" *Tío* Sento himself began to fusillade, and, following his example, all the wedding guests. The hard confetti bounded off the harder heads of the urchins, and the scramble started in the dust. The bombardment continued all the way along the street, as the bride and groom were escorted towards their home.

In front of the tavern, Marieta lowered her head and her face grew pale. Toni *el Desgarrat* was sitting there. *Tío* Sento saw him and smiled in triumph. In answer "Rags" contented himself with an indecent gesture. How spiteful of him, the girl thought, to bring that touch of bitterness into her day of pride!

At the old homestead of *siñá* Tomasa, now *tío* Sento's house, hot chocolate was waiting. "But careful not to eat too much—it's only an hour till dinner-time!" Don Julian, the notary, had raised this voice of counsel; but the throng had rushed upon the sweetmeats, and in no time, the table in the great hall, with room for more than a hundred chairs, had been stripped as clean as a bare floor.

Marieta, meanwhile, had gone up to the bridal chamber, the bedroom famous for its expensive grandeur, of which *siñá* Tomasa had been so proud. She was removing her wedding gowns for something lighter. Soon she came back downstairs, dressed in a simple muslin with short sleeves, *siñá*

Tomasa's jewels gleaming on her arms, her breast, her neck, and her ears. The notary was chatting with the curate, who had just hurried down from the sacristy. The guests had gone out into the yard, where they tended to gather toward the kitchen to watch the last preparations for the great banquet. Dimoni was playing his clarinet to the limit of his lungpower. The mob of urchins was shouting and capering outside, challenging for new fusillades of almonds and scrambling for the handfuls that were thrown out.

'Not even Balshazzar had such a feast," was the curate's comment as he took his seat at table; and the notary, not to be outdone in erudition, referred to the wedding banquet of a fellow named Comacho, that he had read about in some book or other. For the notary did not know for sure whether Cervantes was a Deputy or a prophet in the Bible! For the less distinguished guests there were other tables in the yard. With these Dimoni had taken his place; and he was sending the waiter time after time to fill his glass with red wine.

The food was served in large pots, and quarters of chicken were almost as numerous as the grains of rice in the sauce that covered them. And for once in their lives those peasants were eating like *señores*—not fishing with spoons and forks in a common pot, but each with a plate and a glass of

his own, and a napkin into the bargain. Rustic courtesy, meanwhile, was at its best. "Do try this second joint," friend would cry to friend over the length of the table; and the viand would be forwarded from hand to hand till it reached its destination. Then a bow and a smile of acknowledgment—as though this particular second joint were better than any other.

Marieta, sitting at her husband's side, was eating with scant appetite. Her face was pale, and painful thoughts kept flitting in wrinkles across her brow. Nervously she kept her eyes on the door, as if Toni *el Desgarrat* might appear there at any moment. That rascal was capable of anything! How bitterly he had reproached her that night when she had bidden him good-bye forever! She would have reason to remember him—and repent of her selfishness in marrying for money. Strangely, however, she felt a certain satisfaction in the *Desgarrat's* jealousy. He loved her! And it was pleasant to think of that—now that he was lost beyond recall!

The meal was beginning to brighten. By the time the stews were gone, and the roasts were beginning to vanish down those voracious throats, rough jests and practical jokes were enlivening the festival. Some of the guests were warming to the wine, and their loosened tongues were venturing on witticisms at the expense of bride and bridegroom

that brought roars of satisfied laughter from *tío* Sento and blushes of embarrassment to Marieta's brown face.

At dessert, Marieta arose, took a plate in her hand and began to go around the table. Pin-money for the bride! *Pera agulletes!* She made her appeal in her tiny girlish voice. And doubloons, half-doubloons, gold coins of every denomination, began to drop into it, especially from the relatives of the groom, who wanted him to remember them in his will!

Two pesetas only came from the curate, with the excuse that the Church could do no more, in such days of liberalism.

At the end of her round, Marieta poured the coins from the tin plate into her purse with a jingle of metal that was a delightful thing to hear.

And now the banquet had become a banquet indeed. Everyone was talking at the same time. People on the outside had come up to the windows to watch the merry throng.

"Bomba! Bombaaa!"

At this signal for a toast, the company fell silent for a moment. The wag of the company rose unsteadily to his feet:

"A toast to the bride
A toast to the groom
Invite me next time—if there's room!"

And the company, as though the labored joke had not been old in the days of their grandfathers, roared their applause:

"Vitor! . . . Vitooor!"

And therewith everyone in turn to his feet, with a couplet, a jest, at the expense of the "happy couple," jests that rapidly degenerated in tone, till the curate thought it best to take flight upstairs where the women had gathered in a separate parlor!

Then some one, in a moment of uncontrollable joy, thought of smashing his glass on the table. This was the signal for a general bombardment. The guests broke all the dishes on the floor, then began to throw bits of bread, cakes, almonds, lozenges, and finally fragments of china at *tío* Sento.

"Enough of this, enough I say," the bridegroom called when the joke had gone too far. "Enough of this!"

But the men were hot with wine and the joy of combat. They redoubled their assault. The curate and the women came hurrying down the stairs in great alarm.

"Out of here with you, out of here!" *Tío* Sento's wrath was boiling. Brandishing his heavy cane he drove his guests one by one through the door out into the yard, whence stones and other missiles came flying back against the windows.

"What a good time!"

V

At nightfall the guests from the outlying districts began to drive off, singing at the top of their voices and wishing the couple a happy future. Later the townspeople went out into the dark streets, the women steering their tottering husbands along the uneven side walks. The notary, who for some time had been sound asleep in a corner, his glasses on the tip of his nose for once, was awakened by his secretary and dragged out through the front door. At ten o'clock only the near relatives of the two families were left.

"Filla mehua, filla mehua," Marieta's mother was crying, *"Adiós!"* And one would have thought, from her apparent sorrow, that the child was on her way to the grave.

Not so the teamster! With more than enough wine to his portion, he was in a jocular mood, and kept protesting at his wife's gloom. "You didn't fare so badly, when I carried you off, did you, old girl!" Finally he tore her loose from her daughter, and dragged her still weeping toward the door.

Tía Pascuala, the servant, went off to her garret room. The special waiters and cooks, hired for the occasion, had already gone home. The house fell silent. *Tío* Sento and Marieta were alone, seated in the disordered banquet room which was still brightly lighted by the many candles.

They sat for a long time in silence—*tío* Sento admiring his conquest. How pretty she looked, in her muslin costume, nestling in the big chair! And how small! "What a fate to be tied to that old fool!" Marieta was thinking, as the image of Toni *el Desgarrat* hung fixedly before her mind.

A bell struck in the distance.

"Eleven o'clock!" said *tío* Sento. He rose from his chair, put out the candles in the banquet room, and with a single light in his hand observed:

"It is time to go to bed."

They had just entered the great bedroom, when *tío* Sento stopped.

The whole neighborhood seemed suddenly to turn into a pandemonium of noise, as though the call for the Last Judgment had suddenly descended upon Benimuslín. A terrible beating of tin cans, a wild rattling of hundreds of cow-bells, a beating of boards and sticks, a fusillade of pebbles against the side of the house, and a flare of rocket after rocket up from the ground under the very windows of the bedroom.

The meaning of it all flashed through *tío* Sento's mind.

"Yes, I know who is at the bottom of this! If it weren't for jail, I'd settle that fellow in a jiffy!"

Marieta, who had first been frightened by the uproar, now burst into tears. Her friends had warned her. "You are marrying a widower, so of course there'll be a serenade!"

And a serenade it was, indeed! After the first burst of noise, came allusive couplets followed by applause and laughter, songs sung to the tune of a clarinet, with references to the age, the prowess, and the grotesqueness of the bridegroom, allusions to the past of Marieta, predictions as to her future fidelity to her decrepit husband! A hoarse voice that Marieta well recognized boasted of past relations with the bride.

"You swine! You curs!" *tío* Sento roared, and he stamped up and down the bedroom, beating the air with his fists as if he were trying to kill the withering sarcasm on the wing.

A morbid curiosity came over him. He must see who the jailbirds were to take such liberties with him! He blew out the candle, and peered down into the street from under a corner of the curtain.

The whole village seemed crowded into the neighborhood. A score or more of torches were blazing along the side walk throwing everything into a livid glow. But in the front line stood Toni *el Desgarrat* and all the relatives of *siñá* Tomasa. And among them, among them, Dimoni, the clarinet-player, the man who all that day had been enjoying the hospitality of his house! Even now, probably, he had in his pocket the two dollars he had received at eight o'clock! The traitor! The indecent wretch! He was probably the author of most of those couplets!

Tío Sento felt the work of a lifetime slipping

through his fingers. Was he not the leading man in town? Yet there they all were, watching his disgrace, enjoying it, taking liberties with him, because he had seen fit to marry a pretty girl! And his blood boiled within him, the blood of the tried *cacique,* trained to ruling a political District and accustomed to having his will obeyed.

There was another burst of noise with pans and rattles and cow-bells.

Then "Rags" bawled another couplet on Beauty and the Beast following it with a funeral dirge on *tío* Sento's readiness for the grave.

"Gori, Gori, Gori!" chanted the multitude taking up this word, from the lament of the dead, that Toni had used for a refrain.

The rascal, meanwhile, had spied *tío* Sento's face at the window. He picked something up from the ground and came forward into the yard. It was a pair of huge horns fastened to the end of a stick. He held them up toward the window. Other men advanced carrying a coffin, and in it an effigy, with grotesque eyebrows yards long.

Blind with rage and humiliation, *tío* Sento withdrew. He felt his way along the wall of the dark room, found his shotgun and went back to the window. He raised the curtain, and then the sash. Almost without aiming he fired, first one barrel, and then the other.

There was a great surge in the throng, then a

mighty shout of terror and anger. The torches went out. There were sounds of flight in all directions. Then cries:

"Assassin! Murder! Sento did it! The thief! Kill him! Kill him!"

Tío Sento however did not hear. He was standing in the middle of the room, the smoking gun in his hands, quite beside himself, unable to collect his thoughts. Marieta had collapsed in terror on the floor!

"Now will you shut up? Now will you shut up?" he kept murmuring.

There came a sound of tramping feet, and a loud knock at the door:

"Open, in the name of the law!"

Tío Sento came out of his stupor. The door was thrown open. A squad of policemen came into the room, their hobnails grating on the polished floor.

As *tío* Sento went out into the yard between two officers he saw a body lying on the ground. It was Toni *el Desgarrat* riddled like a sieve. Not a slug had gone to waste.

Toni's friends gathered round with drawn knives, among them Dimoni, who kept striking out at *tío* Sento with his clarinet.

But the officers held the mob off. *Tío* Sento walking along between them sunk anew in his stupor.

"What a wedding night!" he muttered: *"Bonita nit de novios!"*

THE GENERAL'S AUTOMOBILE

"No, I shall not be going back to Mexico. Whatever happens to General Castillejo, that is not just the place for me. That affair of the general's automobile has spoiled everything, so far as I am concerned."

Isidro Maltrana had been promising the story of the general's automobile during all that evening, seated with a group of Spanish friends in a small restaurant off lower Broadway in New York. The party had lasted for several hours already, and the room was heavy with cigarette smoke and the smell of unwashed dishes from the kitchen.

Maltrana had been telling the story of his life as an adventurer and wandering journalist in the various republics of South and Central America, chapters in a "Comédie Humaine" that he had actually lived, and which had been famous in Europe and Spanish America from the many novels his roving career had inspired.

"The most celebrated *canaille* in Madrid," he had styled himself once, in summarizing his character as a wielder of a mercenary pen letting his genius out for hire to the highest bidder, fighting duels for

causes he did not believe in, heaping abuse upon men and things which, underneath, he respected, all in consequence of that struggle with poverty and oppression which had been portrayed in a novel called "The Horde."

Eleven years before, he had landed on the American continent at Buenos Aires. Essentially a bohemian, never satisfied with what he had, he was always moving on in search of something better, passing meanwhile, from failure to failure. In speaking of this part of his life's history, Maltrana had compared himself, with some pride, to the old "Conquistadores" such as Captain Orellana, who one day set out from Peru, coursed down one stream into a larger one, and finally reached the Atlantic at the south of the Amazon. In Argentina he had tried farming, gone bankrupt, and returned to journalism to make a living, going from republic to republic, but always northward. "I was the friend of several presidents," Maltrana had confided. "Some used me for a buffoon to amuse them; others treated me as a secret councillor of state. I did publicity work for the First Ladies of the Lands, describing their new dresses, imported from Paris, and their dinners and balls, just as I wrote speeches, constitutional amendments and proclamations for their husbands to present to Parliament or public. From some of these men I ran away for fear of being shot—I knew too

much, you see. Other times, they would be assassinated, and I would lose my place."

"Finally," Maltrana had been saying, "I reached Mexico and there I seemed to be making good.

"I had become a sort of secretary and general publicity agent for the generals leading the revolution against Porfirio Diaz. No one was my equal in drawing up proclamations to the people of Mexico, addresses of 'The Commander in Chief to his Troops,' strategical analyses of great victories of the 'insurrectionists' over 'federals,' with comparisons with the battles of Napoleon, Cæsar, and the great captains of history. Everyone praised me for my lyric style and my enormous erudition. 'My how much that Maltrana knows!' 'How much that Maltrana must have read!' I passed the régime of Madero and Huerta with increasing reputation. Under Carranza I had gotten to be the most intimate confidant of General Castillejo, who had promised to make me his general purchasing agent in the United States on a ten per cent commission, the moment he became president of Mexico four years thence. And I really believe that everything would have turned out well had it not been for the recent revolution which puts an entirely new aspect on that episode of the general's automobile."

"Tell us about that," his friends now insisted. "You started to several times."

"Well," said Maltrana, "as I was saying, Castillejo was an interesting chap. He was only twenty-two, when I first met him, but he was always one of the most intimate and influential friends of Carranza. That was the way with all Carranza's chief assistants. When the old man got his cabinet and leading advisers together for a conference he looked like a schoolmaster getting ready to examine a class.

"General Castillejo was a short lean little man, as spry as a squirrel and with lots of muscle for a man of his size. The most striking feature of his milk-chocolate face was his eyes, sharp, sparkling, domineering, when you looked squarely into them. That was not so easy to do, however, for there was always a mobile, fugitive leer on his countenance, as if he were trying to hide some evil thought. His slanting eyes and dark skin were scarcely in harmony, though, with his frank, keen almost European, profile. He was, on the whole, one of those types quite common in our Spanish America, a hybrid of two, if not three races, Indian, Hispanic, and African."

"Did he own the automobile?" asked one of Maltrana's friends impatiently.

"I am coming to that," the journalist replied. "You must know that after I became his secretary, for having described one of his bloodless victories to the disadvantage of Wellington at Waterloo—I don't defend myself, understand—I was simply playing

the game—Castillejo took quite a shine to me. In fact, in his very occasional moments of good humor, he would slap me on the back and call me 'Maltrana,' with an affectionate diminutive on my name. I became entirely solid in his favor, though, by my book called the *History of the Army of the West.* That was the division which Castillejo had commanded in the war against Villa. I don't remember that that particular corps ever did any fighting; but in my book I showed clearly that the triumph of Carranza had been due exclusively to that division. Of course, I also had written a *History of the Army of the East,* and others for the armies of the North and South, showing the same about each of them. Was I ever caught? Of course not. To begin with no such armies ever existed. But the books came out under the names of various generals, who were very careful never to let on that I had done the work. That was the way with Castillejo. When all the newspapers referred to the *History of the Army of the West,* as the greatest piece of military erudition since Cæsar's Commentaries, and the best piece of writing since Cervantes the general couldn't contain himself for pride. You would have thought the style belonged to him. But anyhow he was immensely pleased with me, and attached me more closely than ever to his person.

"Well, I was getting along finely, for once in my

life, when the campaign for the presidential elections came on last year. The Government which had issued from the Revolution was anxious to do two things: have elections that would seem to be quite legal, and at the same time be sure that its own candidate would come out victorious. Meanwhile, a number of generals came forward for the office, threatening to start a revolution unless they were elected. They all spoke of legality and respect for the laws. At the same time they kept feeling of their belts to be sure their revolvers were ready. The public as a whole, weary of ten years of revolution, was hoping that the generals would kill each other off before election, so that it could vote in peace either for the existing Government or for the general who would overthrow that Government. The only way to be sure of your skin, in Mexico, is to side with the boss of the moment.

"As I said, my general, Castillejo, was a confidant of the president, and, accordingly, in favor of the candidate the president had put forward. Since the other aspirants to the place all belonged to the army, the Government candidate made 'antimilitarism' the issue. Castillejo, and other generals on the president's side, who, in their time, had shot hundreds of people, and burned dozens of towns and villages, and were still living in time of peace with all the violence of war itself, began to make speeches

everywhere—I wrote one of them myself—singing the bliss of a country governed by civilians, and the need of doing away with militarism once and for all.

"Those were busy days for me. At the orders of Castillejo, I wrote articles, speeches, and proclamations by the volume. Of course it was easier for me to write like that in Mexico than it would have been anywhere else. All you have to do is to work variations on a single theme—American intervention. To get an editorial in defence of the government you describe the opposition as a bunch of 'traitors bent on producing anarchy and provoking an American intervention to restore order.' If you're writing against the Government you may say that the graft and cruelties practiced by the régime in power make intervention from the United States inevitable unless the people make a change, long overdue, in their rulers. Without the phantom of American intervention, there would be no literature in Mexico. Of course, if you get actually tired of that theme, you can accuse your antagonists of having sold out to filthy American gold. According to the papers, somebody sells out to the United States every day in Mexico. Add up all the money that is daily spent by the Americans in buying up writers in Mexico, and you get a pile that would run Uncle Sam clean broke."

"But when are you going to tell us about the auto-

mobile?" Maltrana's companions again interrupted.

"I'm nearer to that than you think," the exile replied. "I must tell you, that as the campaign went on, my general got gloomier and gloomier every day. And the surprising thing was that he didn't seem to be worrying at all about the army men who were threatening the revolution. He was giving his entire attention to something quite different. There was a young fellow of about the general's age who was an engineer educated in some technical school of the United States. His name was Taboada.

"Now this Taboada was always harping on the question of American democracy, insisting that the American democratic system, with political contests carried on under law and respect for conflicting opinions, should be introduced into Mexico. Not merely this. Taboada, who was an agreeable and a clever chap, at the instance of some friends of his, had even come forward as a candidate for the presidency, insisting, moreover, that he was the 'only true civilian candidate' in the field.

"When the general told me that the engineer was running, I rubbed my eyes in astonishment. 'Is the fellow crazy?' I asked. 'He will do well if he gets his own vote. However,' I went on, 'if you are worried about what he is doing and saying, why, of course, I'll demolish him with an article. It's easy, you see. We'll simply say that he has sold out to the

United States, and that's why he wants to introduce the American method of holding elections. I'll assert point blank that he got two millions straight from Washington to make his campaign with. If you think two millions too low, I'll make it five. The amount won't matter so much, because, of course, I'll say I saw him get the money with my own eyes.' To tell the truth my pride as a writer was at stake in telling a good lie. More than once I had found myself outstripped by the writers of the other side, who had a perfectly discouraging facility for making slanders up out of whole cloth.

"Now don't get nervous . . . I'm coming to the automobile . . . Some of the colleagues of my general, Castillejo, went much farther than I would ever have gone. 'See here, General,' they would say, 'if that fool engineer is too much on your mind, you just say the word. Nothing simpler . . .' Idiots! As though my general didn't know that already! As though he hadn't thought of it a hundred times himself. And, in fact, he replied to all such propositions 'Nonsense! The other side would put Taboada's murder up to the Government, make a martyr of him, and get us in a hole. No, let's not bother with the fellow at all!'

"But I knew the general had something else in view, though I couldn't understand quite why he worried so over that poor insignificant engineer, who

didn't have the ghost of a show to get anywhere in the elections.

"But one of his intimate friends let me in on the secret one night, when I was out on a time with him.

"'What's worrying the general so?' I asked. 'Doesn't seem to be himself?'

"The friend smiled knowingly: 'Oh, the general! Huh, huh! He's jealous, that's all. He's tearing around as if he had the toothache. That girl of his, Olga del Monte, seems to be in love with the engineer Taboada!'

"You probably don't know that Olga del Monte was the Aspasia of the Mexican Revolution. The daughter of a good family of Mexico City, her imaginative and notorious escapades had quite disgraced her very respectable relatives. She had dyed her hair blonde in a country where most of the natives are very dark brunettes. She had lived a while in Paris and the cultivation and charm she had taken on in that period of her education had an irresistible fascination for the young centaurs of the Revolution who had never been outside of Mexico. She could play the piano and the harp very well. She had a fair voice as a singer, and was quite nifty in composing music and writing poetry. All that was enough to drive those young generals wild. But in addition her social position was what influenced their

passion most. In spite of all the speeches the generals made against the wealthy and against class distinctions, they liked Olga because she was a born aristocrat. It flattered their vanity to think of themselves as 'friends,' 'protectors' of a girl from one of the best families in the republic. A few years before, you see, they had been peons on estates in the country or vagrants wandering from town to town.

"The most expensive gifts began to pour in on Olga from the various generals competing for her hand and favor. The conquerors showed the generosity that bandits always have when it comes to spending the booty they have amassed without much effort. At times Olga would go to the trouble of remodeling the precious ornaments. Then again she would wear bracelets, combs, or necklaces just as they had been given to her; and people would point to her diamonds, her emeralds, or her pearls, and whisper the names of their real owners, ladies high up in the society of the old Government that had been overthrown, and who were then in exile abroad.

"It happened that in this spendthrift competition for Olga's favor, my general, thanks to a specially romantic strain in his character, had won out. For that matter his gifts to the young lady had been astounding. On entering Mexico City at the head of the 'Army of the West' he had transferred all the

booty in his possession—and he was no mean collector when it came to plundering a town—directly to the beauty's house. With the result that, at the time I am speaking of, he could justly consider himself the proprietor of the very desirable creature.

"However, the romantic Olga eventually, through one of those caprices in her variable temperament, got tired somehow of conquerors, and began to show marked preference for the poor and the persecuted. Variety, after all, is just as necessary to life as magnificence. The military men were wealthy, bad-mannered braggarts, far below the intellectual level of Olga del Monte, not her style at all, either, in matters of cultivation. For a person who had enjoyed untold splendor, a man without money, without boastfulness or pretentions might easily acquire a charm of romance as you can see. At any rate, Olga tired of Castillejo and took up with Taboada, the engineer. He was a frail, delicate individual, well-mannered, gentle by disposition, hostile to the generals, and devoted to the regeneration of his country by the advent of the poorer classes to power. The generals moreover, had not been slow in letting Olga know that the attention she was receiving from the young scientist were highly displeasing to them. They talked of wringing that bantam's neck, if he didn't let her alone. Could anything make a man more interesting than to be in immediate danger of

his life, all the time, and for her sake? Taboada satisfied an idealistic impulse in Olga's nature—her sentimental love for the downtrodden and the unfortunate.

"Well, Castillejo did everything he could to get Olga out of the engineer's reach. He got the President to promise her a lucrative position in New York, and then in Paris. She was to go abroad with a magnificent outfit of Mexican hats and costumes and give recitals of Mexican songs at dances, at a salary of fifty thousand dollars a year. She would be classed as an agent of the Government doing Mexican propaganda abroad. History, doubtless, would come to refer to her as a great benefactor of the country. Unfortunately, Olga always declined. She preferred her engineer and refused to accept other appointments no less honorable and remunerative.

"The advisors of Castillejo would occasionally come back to their original point: 'One word from you general, and we'll arrange . . .' But Castillejo repelled such suggestions with a goodness of heart that made you shiver. When my general brought his uprightness and rectitude into play, I always felt my hair begin to stand on end. 'Let no one lay a finger on that boy. Any harm done to him would be laid at the feet of the Government. I declare the man's person sacred!' I remember that at the time, when I heard him say that, I said to myself

that if he ever declared my person sacred in that tone of voice, I would take the next train for Larado, if I could make it. . . .

"As the election campaign dragged on, the general seemed to forget all about Olga. But he couldn't forget the engineer. That poor deluded idealist, followed by a dozen or more innocents, as unconscious of the danger they were in as he was, went around making speeches against the Government and defending Taboada's candidacy against the aspersions of the generals. He, said they, was the only civilian candidate able to set up a truly democratic régime! Of course, nobody ever went to hear him speak. If he did get a crowd sometimes, it was a crowd of big sombreros, who would interrupt what he was saying to call him 'Yankee,' 'gringo,' *'gachupin,'* traitor, and other compliments of the kind.

"And now, my friends, if you listen, you'll begin soon to hear the toof-toof of the general's automobile.

"Castillejo's auto was of a famous American make —the auto I mean, that I'm going to talk about. As a matter of fact, he had any number of cars, a garage full. There isn't a Mexican general who hasn't quite an assortment—not counting the parlor-car they each own for their trips by rail. During the Revolution, all you had to do to get a car, was be a

general, and then go into a garage with your revolver and take your pick.

"But Castillejo didn't want anybody to mistake his automobile for that of an ordinary general. He had one imported from the United States, and used to point to it as evidence that he was a man of progressive ideas. He admired the United States for two things—its fire-arms and its automobiles. That may not seem much but it is something. A Mexican general doesn't have to know anything about Emerson, or Poe, or Longfellow. 'Did you ever notice,' he would say to me, 'what dinky little cars those gringos turn out?'

"And his, in truth, was a beauty—light, with stylish lines, and an engine that was a devil for speed—the biggest, most expensive, most fashionable machine the Americans make. I confess that I admired it as much as my general.

"Many nights, as I would be leaving the office of Castillejo's paper, he would come and get me, and take me for a drive about the principal streets of Mexico—or, to be exact, along the only avenues which, under different names, and with different breadths, stretch several miles in length from the National Palace to the Park of Chapultepec.

"You all know, of course, that the streets of Mexico are the best lighted of any city in the world, though all that illumination does few people any

good because there's rarely anybody on the streets at night. As you ride along you think you are in one of those enchanted cities of the *Thousand and one Nights,* where everybody has been put to sleep and the place is really dead. In early revolutionary days, things were a bit more lively. Then you could see officers speeding along, occasionally, in taxis and shooting revolvers from the windows at passing carriages—just for fun. But during the election season everything was quiet. People kept indoors, feeling a revolution in the air.

"However, on our drives, the general would take me from Chapultepec to the Plaza del Gobierno and then back from the Plaza del Gobierno to Chapultepec. The way we made time, you would have thought we were on important business and that the general had to get somewhere. 'There goes Castillejo!', a chance passer-by would remark, with veneration and with fear. 'Wonder where he's going now?' Sometimes insults would be shouted at us; but they were always for me, the *gachupin* Maltrana, who was always in the seat of honor in the general's automobile. Castillejo always sat in front with the chauffeur, leaving me on the back seat. Sometimes he would take the wheel himself, but the chauffeur did most of the driving. And the way he could make that engine hum! You'd have thought the automobile dated from the time of Montezuma.

"My faith in presentiments dates from one evening when I declined the general's invitation to go for a drive, on the pretext that I had work to do. I felt something was going to happen, somehow. The truth was, Castillejo seemed to be in a terrible mood, when he came into the office. I had not recognized him at first. He had goggles on, and an automobile cap was pulled down over his ears. Then he was wearing a big overcoat that reached to his heels and completely hid his uniform. There was a fierce glow in his eyes, and an expression of determination on his face. One thing that impressed me particularly was the smell of alcohol on his breath; for the general was a sober man.

"My excuse, nevertheless, did not work. Castillejo sat down, and said he would wait till I had finished my article. As a matter of fact, I had finished it long before. Finally, seeing there was no help for it, I told him I was ready.

"When we reached the sidewalk, the general said: 'Get in, in the back seat.' For all the world his tone of voice was the one he gave commands in to the famous 'Army of the West.' When I was in my place, Castillejo took his usual seat in front beside the chauffeur.

"I feel some pride, to tell you the truth, as I think of how accurately I foresaw what was going to happen. As I lay back there on the cushions, I kept

asking myself what in the devil the general was up to; and suddenly I thought of the engineer, and then I thought of Olga. And the shivers began to run up and down my back. 'He's going out to shoot that man,' I thought. 'But why does he take me along? I might squeal on him!' And then the goose-pimples on my body got an inch or two higher. 'Of course,' I concluded, with my hair on end. 'Of course! He'll say I did it.' I began to wish I had never met my protecting general, that I had never seen Mexico; and I began to wonder how long it would take me to get to the American border, if anything did happen. At the same time, I kept noting with pride in my own cleverness, the accuracy with which I had been predicting the general's movements to myself.

"Just as I had foreseen, the automobile turned off the main avenue at the street leading toward Olga del Monte's residence, and we drove along, for some time, between rows of newly built houses, where there were no signs of a light or of people about. He stopped, again as I had suspected, at a corner, just beyond which the lady's residence was located. Here the street lamps were far apart, and some beautiful tall and thickly grown trees shaded the broad sidewalks. In fact, the darkness was absolute except in three strips of faint twilight, one down the middle of the street, where the trees did

not quite come together; and the other two along the houses on either side, to which the branches did not quite reach.

"As the auto stopped, the chauffeur turned out the lights. It was like a ship coming to anchor and darkening its lanterns in order not to be seen.

"Two men, in big straw hats, stepped up to us out of the darkness. They were tough-looking individuals, whom I had never seen before. But I guessed their identity pretty well. They were some of the men the general's friends referred to as waiting for 'one little word, and things would be arranged . . .' Without any doubt whatever, they had come to assassinate the engineer. And I thought of poor Taboada who at that moment was probably in Olga's house, talking of his hopes and dreams, without the least idea that death was waiting for him at her door.

" 'Remember his person is sacred,' I heard the general whisper to the two men. 'Of course, if he should try to escape . . .'

"All the structure of speculation I had been erecting in my mind, meanwhile, collapsed at these words. So those men were not to kill the engineer. Well, what was going to happen then?

"I peered out of the auto in the direction of Olga's door, but I could not see the house on account of the trees.

"The chauffeur left the wheel and exchanged

places with the general. Castillejo seemed to have more confidence in his own ability, whatever he had in mind. Nevertheless, the pair began to talk in a low voice, testing the spark and the clutches, racing and slowing down the engine. I don't know anything about automobiles, but I could understand from their expressions of satisfaction, that everything was in good running order. Moreover, I could hear the barely audible purr of the engine, which the slightest touch on the accelerator set driving with tremendous speed.

" 'You're going to see something interesting tonight, Maltrana,' said my general, in a low but good-natured voice, and without turning his head.

" 'But why in the devil should he be dragging me into it?' I reflected with the little brains my fright had left me to think with.

"Five minutes may have passed. Perhaps it was an hour. I don't know. In such circumstances one pays no attention to the flight of time.

"All I know is that, suddenly, I heard two men begin to quarrel in loud drunken voices. I looked out. Just this side of Olga's house, the two men in the sombreros had begun to strike at each other with their fists and make a racket.

"Just beyond them, I saw a slight slender figure stop, hesitate and then finally start across the street toward the other sidewalk.

"In one of those instantaneous flashes of intuition,

I saw what had happened: Olga's door had opened to let the engineer out, and then closed quickly behind him.

"The engineer had gone down the steps and turned our way along the sidewalk. But then the two ruffians had started their quarrel and he would have to pass them if he went on.

"Taboada had drawn his revolver, but had thought a moment, and decided not to risk the encounter. Instead of keeping on, he would cross to the other sidewalk and pass them on the other side of the street.

"I did not have time to think any further. I felt myself thrown back against the cushions behind me.

"The automobile had started ahead at full speed, almost throwing me into the air with its mighty bound.

"From that moment I lost all normal perception of what was going on, and I did not get full control over my nerves again for many days. As I look back upon the scene, it seems to me something crazy, wild, impossible, the mad raving of a dream.

"The automobile darted out of the shadow into the streak of light in the middle of the road. The engineer saw the machine coming and stepped back. The auto turned slightly toward him. Taboada changed his mind and started ahead again. Again the auto turned and dashed directly at him. It was

all the matter of fractions of a second, though it seems like hours now as I think of it. I remember a frantic leap by the engineer with his arms in the air; then the thud of the automobile as it struck him, then a bump under the forward springs as the front wheels passed over his body, and another lunge as he was struck by the hind wheels. I remember, also that the machine took the shock very easily because of its excellent springs.

"Instinctively I looked out of the auto after we had passed. I saw a formless mass lying on the ground, writhing in anguish like a snake cut in two; and from that human package, from which a pair of arms was reaching out and clawing into the ground with the fingers of the hands, a cry was rising:

" 'Brute, you've killed me.'

"Our machine was at the end of the street, going at full speed. It rounded the corner with a sharp turn that nearly threw me from my seat. But the general was only making a wide turn. He circled the whole area of the cross-roads and came down the street again toward the engineer's prostrate form.

"Taboada, on seeing the automobile returning, had stopped shouting, perhaps in terror, perhaps because he thought the machine was coming back to pick him up.

"At any rate, the shock this time was ruder. The

auto leapt into the air as it struck the obstacle at full speed, and I heard one of the brake-rods snap as we struck the ground again. We kept on to the avenue, however. Though the general turned and came back again. And so up and down, up and down, over the victim's body. How many times, I do not know. Each time however, the shock was less violent, and after the second impact there had been no cries at all.

"The next day all the papers had headlines about the terrible accident that had happened to poor Taboada on his way home that night. And there were violent editorials against joy riders speeding in the city streets after dark, without regard to the dangers of innocent passers-by.

"For General Castillejo, I wrote an editorial which appeared in our paper, where I lamented the death of this statesman who had come to a most unhappy end, a gentleman, a patriot, and a man of talent, in whose passing, despite the unsoundness of his political ideas, the country and science had suffered an irreparable loss.

"That was the end of it. In a few days, the whole episode was forgotten. The elections ended in an uprising of the generals. Everybody turned on the President and he was assassinated. I saw what was coming, however, and got across to the United States

before the President abandoned the capital. I wanted to see who was going to win before I wrote any more articles.

"Castillejo was taken prisoner and is still in jail. His fellow generals are prosecuting him for a number of irregularities in office.

"And I'm beginning to get worried. The latest charge against him is the murder of the engineer Taboada. No one takes any stock in the story of the automobile accident. It seems that a great many people living along the street, heard the engineer's cries and witnessed what was going on from behind closed shutters. Though they kept quiet for a time, they are now telling all they know to curry favor with the new régime. Of course, it may well be that not more than one of them really saw anything. The others may simply be repeating what they have heard.

"You fellows may think it quite fine of the present generals in power that they intend to bring Castillejo to justice. Nothing in that, at all. They won't do anything to him. He will put it all off on me, and being not a *gachupín,* what chance will I have? Bet your life, I'm not going back to Mexico!

"Even if they do anything to my former general, it will be not out of love for justice but in a spirit of jealousy and vengeance. They hate Castillejo because they admire him and are envious of his in-

genuity, with the spirit of rivalry a painter feels on seeing a competitor using a new secret for treating light, or a novelist jealous of the inventiveness of another writer's plots.

"The maddening thing to them is that they can't use that automobile trick now. It's an old story, you see. And in Mexico the important thing is to be original. . . . ."

MARTINEZ'S INSURRECTION

I

The Revolution safely over—from the point of view of the victorious party at least—its leaders established themselves in the capital of Mexico, and divided up such plums as the directorship of the University, the ministry of the Hacienda, and other agreeable public offices. And then it was that Doroteo Martinez, strenuous revolutionist that he was, began to feel bored, incomprehensibly bored.

Yet he had little enough to complain of. Only six years before he had been nothing more than a second overseer on the estate of an absentee-landlord who spent most of his time in Paris. Then one day he found himself, in company with other "avengers," riding in hot haste to overthrow Huerta, the assassin of Madero. Why shouldn't he too be a revolutionist? Weren't there plenty of Mexicans of as humble a birth as he who had taken that road to becoming cabinet ministers and even "Presidents of the Republic?" . . . Why, even Guadelupe, his wife Guadelupe, who systematically opposed him in every plan he made and in every thought he dared com-

municate to her, even Guadelupe—redoubtable woman—welcomed with enthusiasm his expressed intention of devoting himself henceforth to war.

"Let's see now if you've got it in you to become a general," she challenged him. "It will be a fine thing for the country to have one *generala* who didn't begin life as a kitchen scullion!"

Terror of his wife, unfailing good luck, and a consuming desire to see his name in print (and hear it sung to music in the dance halls) jointly provided the motive power for Doroteo Martinez's rapid and glorious ascension. Without having had to exert himself seriously, Doroteo was a brigadier-general at thirty.

It was Pancho Villa who gave him his first lessons in revolution. Under Villa's flag he fought in nearly every battle against Huerta. But when events narrowed down to a contest between Villa and Carranza, Doroteo's unanswerable intuition assured him that this former "rancher," of solemn and majestic demeanor, this "old whiskers" as he was disparagingly dubbed, looked the president far more perfectly than the former bandit could hope to do; so Doroteo incontinently (but not improvidently) transferred his allegiance to the *Carranzistas.*

And Guadalupe perceived that her husband gave proof, at times, of astonishing acumen.

As long as Carranza occupied the presidency, the

"Citizen-General" Doroteo Martinez—"Hero of the Black Mountain" he had now come to be called—knew all the delights of unlimited power. Nominally at least, his authority extended over a territory more extensive than that occupied by two or three European nations put together, though, as a matter of fact, it was effective only in the town occupied by his own troops.

It must be admitted that the importance of those troops fell a little short of the figures assigned them theoretically. On the government payroll they consisted of twelve thousand men; but on the field they materialized as six or seven hundred. And the horses, which, according to the receipted bills of the Ministry of War, consumed fodder for a brigade of cavalry, were a dozen or more bony nags turned out to forage for themselves in the fields of private citizens.

To believe the newspapers, the fighting was over, and the few "disturbers of the peace" were mere bandits whom the forces of law and order were about to exterminate from one moment to another. Martinez, in fact, had strict orders to send to the firing squads any of his brother generals from the opposite camp who fell into his hands. But he would have a private conversation with them instead; and the next day these "Villistas" would be on the march, not for, but against, their former idol; for Martinez

by this time had learned even a little more than Pancho Villa had taught him.

Of course there were plenty of people at the capital who said that General Doroteo took far more pains to keep the fighting going than to stop it; but at such malevolent suppositions the general could afford to scoff. The whisperings of envy are the measure of success.

The general's private secretary was a young journalist, one of the poets of the "young generation" who edited all the proclamations made within the territory of his chief, proclamations which dealt with all the problems of the human race and its future destinies, viewed in the light of the inexhaustible possibilities of revolution.

"Sandoval, we are going to write out a few proclamations," the general would announce to his secretary after lunch, as though a proclamation or two were the best of all aids to digestion. In them, on one page, he would settle questions of street-cleaning, of free love, of the hours at which movie houses should open, and of new systems for land distribution. The decrees all ended by condemning to death anyone so venturesome as to disobey them. Though no one read them, these documents had their uses. If ever the general wished to suppress anyone, he had only to refer to his proclamations. His prospective victim could not help having disobeyed

the general's orders in some particular or other.

It sometimes happened that the communications sent by Sandoval to the Mexican Government were returned with a note intimating that they were incomprehensible. It was on such occasions that the general's indignation rose to impressive heights.

"What? . . . Is this what we had a revolution for? . . . The Ministry of War is full of imbeciles. . . . They are still back in the dark ages . . . reactionaries, that's what they are . . . don't know symbolism when they see it!"

II

When Doroteo Martinez, second overseer of a country gentleman's estate, abandoned work for revolution, Guadelupe did not hesitate a moment: she followed him. All good Mexicans, whether defenders of the government or revolutionists, take their wives to war. The wives constitute the commissariat of the fighting forces, but on a strictly individualistic basis: each one does the cooking for her man.

On the march they make up the vanguard, surrounded by swarms of children, and carrying the family clothing tied up in a large bundle on their heads.

In this fashion, making forced marches afoot or on horseback, clutching her general round the waist as she slipped up and down on the horse's cruppers, Guadelupe shared the life of the army; but, as Doroteo was rising rapidly in rank, his helpmate soon felt herself far above the crowd of soldier-women, though she, like the rest of them, had yellow skin, greasy hair, and eyes that burned like hot coals. As corpulent as they were thin, she felt herself to be a person of importance, marked for high places in this world.

"Madame Captain Martinez," "Madame Commandant Martinez," "Madame Colonel Martinez." . . . and now this officer's lady and lady-officer was no longer scouring the country afoot or seated behind her husband, but rode on a horse of her own with the other mounted members of the troops (still, however, balancing on her head the mattresses and clothing, which constituted the traveling equipment of the military pair). There was little trouble about the horses; for Doroteo, most considerate of husbands, had thoughtfully killed a government official whose mount would come in handy for Guadelupe.

When he became a colonel, his marital generosity knew no bounds.

If he could only get an automobile for "the old woman!" (the old woman, of course, being Guadelupe, aged twenty-six). Not that there was

any particular difficulty, either, in securing an automobile. With the United States as next-door neighbor, and no tariff at the frontiers, automobiles were as thick as flees in Mexico. Every revolutionist who was anybody at all had at least one, and you could tell at a glance from the number of cars parked behind his quarters whether an officer was of any importance or not.

So, in due time, "Madame Colonel Martinez" went to war in an American touring car; and a bargain at that, you might say, inasmuch as it had cost Martinez just two short words and a brief gesture—namely—sticking his revolver into the ribs of the man who bought the thing.

The chauffeur was a half-breed nearly eclipsed under an enormous sombrero. His bare feet trod the gears, and he rested his rifle on the steering wheel.

In the tonneau behind him rode Guadelupe and her whole outfit: a bundle of pillows, two bagfuls of soiled clothes, a half-breed servant girl whot sat at her feet, three cats and a dog on the seat beside her, and a parrot that strutted about on the inside of the hood, serving as footman for the triumphal chariot.

Guadelupe's fame as a fighter soon came to equal her husband's. Reports even were current to the effect that she was a much better warrior than he.

Certain it was that the *señora coronela* could hold

her own in contests in which the *señor coronel* would inevitably have been routed. When, for instance, her automobile had a collision with that of some general's wife (equally provided of course with mattresses, bundles of soiled clothing, family pets, and countless children) both ladies would begin a machine-gun fire of insults. The colonel's wife without the slightest regard for the higher rank of the person she was addressing, would remind the general's lady of the amorous adventures of the *generala's* mother, or of the equally well-known fact that the *generala's* aunt was the soldiers' washerwoman.

From such contests Guadelupe emerged bristling and apoplectic but usually triumphant. And the men about her considered it quite fitting that the rest of the women should give way to her. Didn't she fight in the ranks with them? . . . While their own women, fat hens that they were, did nothing more useful, for the most part, than scratch about on the field where battles had taken place in the hopes of finding some trophies of victory.

Thus it was that when Doroteo finally became a general, envious tongues attributed his achievement to his wife's prowess rather than to his own. "With that woman to call attention to him, what wonder that he gets what he wants from headquarters?" they muttered. "Nobody ever hears about us!"

But the war over, and Martinez now a champion of the newly proclaimed government, Guadelupe gave up her military career. It would be too ridiculous for the wife of one of the "chiefs in command" to go out in pursuit of mere rebels—and, anyway, many of them had been friends of hers just a few months before, and she still thought well of them.

So, in her own thoroughgoing fashion she renounced the manners of the camp, ceased galloping about the country with a rifle, gave up her mud encrusted automobile, and even the choice language she had picked up in her military career, and devoted herself henceforth to being the *"señora generala"* and vying wtih Doroteo himself in the splendor of the luxury with which she surrounded herself.

Guadelupe by this time was, so to speak, holding court. The ladies of the old régime, constituting by that fact the aristocracy of the country, came to call on the general's wife and vied with one another in flattering her (by what other means could they so effectively protect their persons and their property?) And her husband's subordinates found it expedient to be assiduous in their attentions, and to intimate that they believed implicitly in her power to do them a good turn . . . the general of course, good fellow that he was, could not be expected to do much! . . . And Guadelupe, mindful of her fighting days, addressed these companions-

in-arms of hers with good-natured condescension. Hadn't she, in the good old days, time and time again cooked their dinners over the campfire along with that of her husband and the rest of the staff?

Yes . . . it made her a little homesick to think of those years of warfare. Yet she believed firmly that her present station in life was a great improvement on that of the past. Provided the insurrections only held out, so that Doroteo wouldn't lose his job as "commandant of field operations!"

III

But Martinez meanwhile? . . . It must be admitted that the general was beginning to feel a little less pleased with his domestic arrangements. Guadelupe was beginning to take a great deal upon herself! . . . In fact she behaved as though the whole household should take its orders from her. Now what was the use of having given himself so much trouble to become a national hero if Guadelupe was going to inspire in him such terror that he never dared realize any of his desires?

As the general considered the injustice of his situation, he would gaze reflectively at his wife, who, accustomed to disparaging everything he did, paid not the slightest attention to him. She was still handsome enough, he thought, in spite of her thirty

odd years, as handsome anyway as the day he married her.

And a handsome creature General Martinez thought her for some ten years. But then one day he perceived that something had happened to disturb the equilibrium of the races that up to that time had dwelt in comparative harmony in Guadelupe's person. Apparently the three kinds of blood that had been mixed in her veins had grown tired of associating together and each was declaring its independence of the others and stamping itself upon her appearance as well as making itself evident in her character. For instance, minute black spots began to accumulate on her face and arms, like a kind of small-pox under the skin; and her cheeks were marred with great purplish blotches that came and faded out again, according to the weather. Signs, alas! of the early maturity, flecked with blemishes, of the woman of mixed blood. But all this wouldn't have been so bad if it hadn't been for her violent tempers, the insults to which she treated him, her deplorable ignorance of social usages, and her ferocious determination to keep him in a state of abject submission. . . .

And yet, who knows whether General Doroteo would ever have become aware of his helpmate's shortcomings, had he not been forced by circumstances to compare her with another woman!

When Guadelupe wanted to annoy the general in

the presence of their guests, she would suddenly exclaim:

"Do you see that old fool over there? . . . Well, think of it, at that age, madly in love with a Gringo girl! . . . Did you ever . . . ?"

Then, tightening one fist and pointing at him with the first finger of her other hand, she would add, with a ferocious glare at the poor general:

"Just let me catch you at it, and I'll teach you what's good for you!"

And then, by way of softening this rather harsh joke on the long-suffering Doroteo, she would say:

"That *gringuita* is, I will say, a very decent sort! . . . She earns her own living, and supports all her brothers and sisters, so they tell me. And she knows more than the dictionary! Why, as you hear her talk, you forget to draw your breath! . . . How a woman could ever study so much, I can't imagine. . . . But you'll have all your trouble, for nothing, you old goat! . . . She isn't going to have any time for you!"

The *gringuita,* who, at her father's death had been "sent to the States" to be educated, had found a very flattering reception on her return to her own country. Charmed by her manners, and the informal fashion in which this young woman spoke of subjects which they knew of only by hearsay, some prominent citizens took an interest in her and had her appointed

to teach in one of the best schools in town, promising her besides all manner of help in introducing the innovations that she proposed by way of improving the Mexican school system.

Among these supporters of her projects was the General Doreteo Martinez, who announced publicly, and at frequent intervals, that this young lady who had taken the trouble to learn all the *gringos* had to teach, was worthy of the utmost consideration.

Now the general was right in what he said of the *gringuita's* good looks. There was nothing particularly remarkable about them. But the young school teacher possessed all the charms of youth, enhanced by a thorough training in outdoor sports, and a fund of general information that was a perpetual marvel and delight to the old general. And then, even though she was not of a surpassing beauty, she was so different from Guadelupe!

Her dresses were of a simple elegance such as the general had often admired in magazine illustrations: and as though all this weren't enough, she could play the piano and sing *gringo* songs, and she was as quick and muscular as a boy.

What a contrast to the *generala* who glittered with jewels, went about festooned in silks and laces, and wore towering combs on her thickly pomaded hair!

. . .

The "Hero of the Black Mountain" often visited

the *gringuita* Dora's school. And he could always be counted on to put in an appearance at his wife's *tertulias* when Miss Dora was to be a guest. On such occasions he would say:

"We must get you a University to manage, *señorita!* . . . The Government will find the money. A few millions! . . . And if the Government doesn't, I will! . . . Why, what wouldn't I do for education? . . . What wouldn't I do for . . .!"

Impetuous man! . . . He had almost said "for you"—but one glance at the formidable *generala* restrained him. So, by way of revenge, he sat quietly making comparisons, not in Guadelupe's favor, between her and the youthful Dora.

One morning, his eyes drooping from a sleepless night, he handed a paper to his faithful secretary.

"Tell me what you think of this!" he commanded. "I used to compose verses when I was a boy, with a guitar accompaniment too. But I'm out of practise. You fix them up. The spelling may be a little off. What do you think of them?"

The wary secretary, mindful of the numerous occasions when the hero, irritated by a frank reply, had boxed his ears and in other ways responded to the force of his criticisms, expressed great admiration for the verses in question. They treated of love, and were addressed to a young woman whose

name was not revealed, but which the secretary discerned at the first glance.

"Publish them tomorrow on the front page of the official paper," ordered the general. "Sign them as they are signed here: *El Caballero de la ardiente mirada.* I found that in a novel once, and took a fancy to it. Now I guess I'll use it for myself."

The secretary was about to leave the room with the copy just received when the general stopped him:

"Wait! Tomorrow you are to write—typewrite, of course—an anonymous letter to this lady, and assure her that the 'Knight of the Fiery Glance' and the General Doroteo Martinez are one and the same person."

But this indiscretion was not enough for the enamored Doroteo. The school teacher's serene indifference to these attentions drove him distracted, to such a degree that a few days later he impetuously presented himself at the school, and announced to the amazed Dora that the feelings she aroused in him constituted "the greatest love of his whole life."

But in vain! The more the General spoke of love, the more Miss Dora shook her head. No, indeed! . . . Life was no matter of love affairs for her. She had serious responsibilities! She was a poor girl, and she had to support her brothers and sisters to say nothing of educating them.

"I'll marry you," declared the general dramati-

cally, and much as though mortal courage could go no further. "Do you know—I thought of that before I said anything to you at all. You are not a person to be . . . in short, you are a respectable young lady, a lady professor, and I have the greatest respect for people of scientific attainments. . . ."

Then, triumphantly, he added:

"And anyway, didn't we establish divorce in this country when we made the revolution? . . . I should like to know who has a better right to make use of the new law than I?"

Dora, however, seemed to be far from sharing the general's enthusiasm for this liberal institution. Indeed, she seemed to tremble at the idea of marrying the general quite as much as though he had suggested using violence against her.

"What? . . . You couldn't divorce the *generala!* And I should never dare to make an enemy of Guadelupe!"

The thought that this formidable Amazon might pursue her with vengeful purposes made the young woman quiver like a leaf. And the general, as he noticed her agitation, became infected with it too. It was true enough that his Guadelupe was a terrible woman. But how long would he have to endure her tyranny?

Dora avoided him after this interview. With what result? Simply that the general, discouraged

for a while, began planning how he could carry off the young school teacher and conceal her somewhere in the country. He had plenty of men at his command who would execute his orders no matter how desperate. But then he bethought him of his enemies, the newspapers of the capital. Dora, being a person of some prominence, "of scientific attainments" as the general liked to say, couldn't disappear like a mere school girl. There would be a great hubbub, a scandal! Think of the headlines! The champion of public education carrying off one of the school teachers! And then too there was Guadelupe to be wary of, Guadelupe, who was forever repeating, and in a more threatening tone every time she said it, pointing her finger at him with gruesome suggestion:

"Just let me catch you! I'll teach you what's good for you!"

Meanwhile rumors began to float about the city that Dora had a young man! A youth of the middle classes, it was reported, a rival of his secretary's in the practise of verse-writing, and given besides, to making speeches against the Government. Of course he was poor, just as poor as Dora, but that wasn't likely to prevent the two from marrying.

And so General Doroteo Martinez, the national hero, the all-powerful dictator, was going to remain as dead as a stick or a stone, by the side of his

Guadelupe, while this young whippersnapper carried off the enchanting *gringuita!* . . . By the wrath of God, was this what he had made the revolution for?

IV

But just then some political events forced the general for the moment to forget his affairs of the heart. "Old Whiskers" was thrown out of the presidency by a plot among his generals, former friends of his, and of Martinez's. But the latter had not lost his old habit of turning up on the winning side.

Thus is happened that when Carranza was assassinated, Doroteo Martinez, "The Hero of the Black Mountain," was already on excellent terms with the party in power, and just as much a commander of field operations as under the preceding Government. But alas! There was now greater danger than ever that his office would cease to be necessary.

It seemed that the various parties who up to that time had kept the country in turmoil with insurrectionaries had established a truce over Carranza's dead body. They all of them showed an inclination to submit to the new Government just by way of showing that peace was possible in Mexico, even though it might not last long.

The rebel *guerilleros* presented themselves one

after another to Martinez and the other generals of the republic. Even Pancho Villa, the chronic insurrectionist, came to pay his respects to the new official personages installed in the capital; but for all he submitted to them temporarily, it was with a haughty gesture . . . and besides he was handsomely compensated for his trouble.

But Martinez had his opinion of this matter of giving gifts to a former rebel and nothing much to a real hero of the Revolution like himself.

"That's it!" he told himself with some bitterness. "If they feel sure of you, you don't get anything! What have I been thinking of anyway all these years, never to have kicked up even the smallest insurrection of my own for them? . . . What a mistake, always to have defended the Government!"

Doña Guadelupe meanwhile was taking a hand in the new state of affairs, and bestirring herself even more actively than her husband. The present heads of the Government were old friends of hers whom she hadn't seen for several years. So obviously it was her cue to find for herself—for her husband, that is, a good quiet job with a decent salary, and wait for another crop of insurrections . . . obviously, the history of Mexico wasn't going to come to a permanent standstill!

Perhaps Martinez ought to take a little trip to the capital to renew old friendships? . . . But she

had her doubts about his being just the person to go under present circumstances. Why not go herself? . . . And, as luck would have it, one of her very good friends, the general to whose advances she had responded with a whiplashing, and who had ever since been her devoted admirer, was one of the provisional governors, and one of the most active aspirants to the presidency.

Thus it happened that the newspapers of the capital soon had occasion to announce the arrival of the *generala* Martinez, that "worthy helpmate of the Hero of the Black Mountain"; and scarcely had this bit of news been commented, and digested, than something even more unprecedented than the events usually occurring in the republic, took place. . . .

Scene: Martinez's *pueblo;* time: early morning; actors: several hundred mounted men, all wearing sombreros, all carrying unslung rifles, all shouting.

"Down with the violators of the Constitution!"

The passers-by ran to cover. Not that they cared who had violated the Constitution. Poor Constitution! Worse things than that might happen to her! . . . What were Constitutions made for, anyhow? But the inhabitants of Martinez's *pueblo,* who had cherished hopes of living in peace and quiet for a while, thought it wise to flee to safety at this announcement of a military insurrection.

Martinez, in riding boots, with two revolvers in

his belt, and his wide felt hat adorned with the eagle that constituted his general's insignia, was conferring with his chief of staff.

"Everything is ready. And 'the people' seem to be for us. They are getting bored with so much peace. But what is our war-cry going to be?"

"Down with the violators of the Constitution! Down with the Government!" replied the general gravely.

"We've been shouting that all morning, General. But we ought to give a *'viva!'* to something."

Martinez scratched his head, slipping his finger in under his hat and tilting it at a perilous angle.

"I don't know. . . . We must think up something. . . . Something to consecrate our revolution to. There must be something. We must save the country."

So, while the general was busy thinking, his insurrectionists had to be content with the old war-cry:

"Down with the violators of the Constitution!"

But, such a cry as this lost its merits without immediate action; so, according to good Mexican tradition, the general's supporters began rifling the shops of the foreign tradesmen, breaking down any locked doors they encountered and carrying off whatever money they found, or in fact any object they took a fancy to.

This diversion over, the insurrectionists grew impatient to leave the city. It was good sound insurrectionist tradition to get away from the scene of a revolutionary outbreak before the better organized forces of the capital could arrive with their artillery.

General Doroteo Martinez, accordingly, marched out of the city with his faithful followers. However, needing some consolation for the wrong done the Constitution, he determined to take Dora along with him. So, while her small brothers and sisters shook their poor helpless little fists at the abductors, the General whisked Dora away in his fastest automobile.

V

In the Palace of Mexico, the provisional president and his ministers looked wonderingly at one another. . . .

"Why, what's got into him?" . . . they kept saying, without finding any answer. "What's he after anyway? . . . If he wanted something, all he had to do was to ask for it."

And not being able to explain this unaccountable move of the general's, the mystified heads of the Government began to see all sorts of hidden and terrible forces making themselves manifest in this out-

break. At once they began making up a list of those persons in the capital, who, it seemed to them, might be behind this alarming phenomenon. Guilty or innocent, it would be a good plan to give them all a third degree before a Council of War!

Most indignant of all the ministers in the Palace, was the powerful personage who was known to have been the friend and protector of Martinez and the *generala*. In fact, his anger knew no bounds. Mightn't he himself be suspected of complicity in the outrage?

It was precisely at the moment when the Council, in its deliberations, had taken up the question as to whether a man who had never before opposed the Government, and had started an insurrection only when all other insurrectionary generals were living in exemplary peace and quiet, should be shot, that there was a stir at the door.

"Madame the *generala* Martinez!"

As Doña Guadelupe strode forward into the council chamber, all of those present who were young and had literary aspirations, felt that they had before their very eyes the classic effigy of Vengeance! Her eyes were blazing, so that it was impossible to meet her gaze. On the top of her thickly pomaded hair, that was usually, in her own drawing-room, adorned with a soaring comb, a huge velvet hat was quivering.

"Well, what have you to say about this fool husband of yours?" shouted the *generala's* former protector, waiving all courtesies of greeting. "Doesn't he deserve . . ."

But he stopped short, awed by the *generala's* appearance. Never had she looked so like the Goddess of War, never, not even when she pursued him with her horsewhip!

The Council held its breath.

"I have come," announced Gaudelupe. "I have come to ask for the command of a battalion. I promise to put an end to this good-for-nothing's revolution!"

And turning to the sympathetic young men in her audience, Doña Guadelupe promised to bring her husband there herself, well tied up with the strings of her petticoat.

The president and his ministers began to look upon the *generala* with more favorable eyes.

"Be calm, Doña Guadelupe," said her particular friends, "and let us discuss this matter seriously. We can't give a whole battalion to a woman."

"Well, then, let me go in the ranks with the troops that you send after him! You know my record! . . . You know what sort of fighting I have done!"

"But," said the *generala's* protector. "What is the

matter with Martinez anyway? . . . What has he got against the Government? . . ."

The *generala* turned into the personification of amazement. Even her hat rose a little on her bristling wiry hair.

"What has the Government to do with it?"

Her eyes flaming, her voice deep and hoarse, she clenched her two stout fists.

"Government? . . . He likes you people well enough. . . . He hasn't anything against the Government! . . . I've got my information straight from Headquarters. . . . I know what I'm talking about. No, gentlemen, this insurrection is not aimed at you. It is aimed at me, at me, do you understand, gentlemen? This is an insurrection against the *generala* Martinez! . . ."

A LIFE SENTENCE

For fourteen months he had been there in the narrow eight-foot cell—his world, a rectangle bounded by four white-washed walls, every crack and cranny of which he knew by heart; his sun, the little window cut high above the floor and crossed by iron bars that quartered a small patch of blue sky; his freedom, the right to move barely half the length of the cell to the end of a noisy creaking chain, the ring of which had now cut so deeply into his ankle that it had veritably become a part of his flesh.

He had been condemned to death.

Up in Madrid the Ministry of Justice were reviewing the papers in his case for one last time. For months and months, meanwhile, here he had been lying, buried alive, rotting like an animate corpse in a coffin of stone and mortar, almost yearning, as for a merely momentary pang that would spare his greater tortures, for the instant when the garrote would close about his throat putting an end to everything once and for all.

What annoyed him most was the cleanliness about him. They came in every morning, swept his cell and washed it, leaving the damp to filter gradually

through his pallet and chill him to the bone. Not the slightest fleck of dust was ever left to break the monotony of the white walls, and keep him a little company! Solitude! Utter solitude! If only a rat or a mouse would come in to share his bread and water. That would have been some one to talk to! Or a spider, or a cockroach! He could spend the time taming them!

But no life, save his, was allowed to enter that sepulchre. One day—what a vivid memory it was—a sparrow had alighted on one of the bars of the window and looked in upon him like a mischievous child at play. And the sparrow—incorrigible vagabond of light and space!—had chirped—chirped in surprise, probably, at seeing a man down in that hole, a bleached emaciated man, shivering with cold though it was full summer, sitting there with one piece of tattered cloth knotted around his chest and another piece of tattered cloth knotted about his loins. In the end the bird must have been frightened at the weird figure it saw below, for it shook its feathers, as though to free them from the mustiness exuding from the window, and flew away.

The only sounds that reached him came from other prisoners as they moved about the prison yard. Lucky dogs! They at least could see some sky over their heads, and they didn't have to breathe through an air-hole. Besides, they were not chained to the

wall as he was and they could find some one to talk to. Even in a penitentiary misfortune had its gradations! He, in solitary, could envy ordinary convicts their liberty of the yard; while they in turn could envy the people going up and down the streets outside—probably no better satisfied than the prisoners in the jail, angry at their failure to attain this or that desire! Lots they appreciated their freedom! They ought to be in jail for a while!

He, surely, was on the bottom rung of the ladder of misfortune. In a moment of frenzied desperation he had tried to escape (escape!) digging into the cement floor under him. After that the guards had been instructed to watch him very closely. If he started to sing, some one would come and tell him to be silent. If he tried to mumble aloud such phrases as he could remember of the prayers his mother taught him, again they would come and tell him to be silent. Silence? Why so much silence? Ah, yes, they thought he was shamming—shamming insanity. And it was important, yes, very important that he be in good condition, sound in mind and sound in body, for the great day. You couldn't offer damaged goods to an official strangler!

Madness? No, he was as much afraid of that as anybody. He wanted to keep his head clear. But sitting there day in day out, along with the wretched

stuff they brought him to eat, would likely finish him in the end.

He never could get a good night's sleep! They kept his cell brightly lighted all the time—regulations required it, you see—and in fourteen months he hadn't grown used to it. And besides, whenever he closed his eyes, he would see things. Crazy idea! Somehow his enemies, those who were trying to kill him—and he didn't even know who they were!—seemed to have turned his stomach inside out; and for some reason they kept pinching him with tongs.

As he sat there on his pallet, daytimes, he would think of his own past, but with strange distortions of memory that made his life look like the life of some one else.

When, from a first term in prison, he came back to the little village where he lived, he had been the hero of the whole District. The boys around the taverns and drinking places had made him their idol! *Que bruto es Rafael!* "Rafael's every inch a man!" So much so, that the prettiest girl in town had proposed marriage to him, not because she loved him but because she admired and feared a big strapping courageous fellow like him. Then the folks down at the Town Hall had put him on the mounted police force, counting on his strong right arm, and his sure aim with gun or revolver to prove an invalu-

able asset of "the Party" at election times. And he had made good, he had! He had held "those other fellows"—the "outs"—in the hollow of his hand, till at last they got tired of it, and hunted around for another big fellow who had also just come out of jail and set him up in opposition.

Cristo! A matter of reputation, that was! Not to say, of bread and butter! Yes! Either he or the other one! So at last the time came as it had to come! He had caught him off his guard one day, and shot him—finishing him off afterwards with the butt end of the rifle—to be sure he wouldn't go strutting and bragging around any more.

A fair fight, after all! A little matter between men, he-men!

But prison, nevertheless—the detention prison, where he had met many of "the boys"; and after that, the trial—everybody turning against him to get even for the way he had held them in line as agent of "the party"; and after that, the sentence, that terrifying sentence, and fourteen months of waiting—waiting for death to come, to come from Madrid, in a one-horse team, to judge by the length of time it took in coming!

Rafael was not lacking in courage. Of an afternoon in the taverns he had heard stories read, stories of Juan Portela and Francisco Esteban and how they had defied the law. No, he would face the music

as pluckily as they had! People back home would see how a brave man went to his death!

But then again, at night sometimes, he would leap from his mattress as though shot from a spring, making his chain clank on the floor with an ominous foreboding sound. And he would cry and he would scream—ashamed of himself all the while and doing his best to subdue his weakness. There was somebody inside him, you see, another person whom he had never been acquainted with before, a timid cowardly wretch who moaned and groaned and wept and whimpered and wouldn't keep still till he had drunk half a dozen cups or more of that stew of dried beans and dried figs that passed for coffee in the prison fare. Of the old Rafael, who had been eager for death to escape the weariness of confinement, nothing but the shell was left. This new fellow had been growing up inside that shell, and he thought of the fourteen months only to reflect with terror that fourteen months was a long time and probably the end could not be very far off; and he hoped and prayed for as many more months still, willing to live in any misery if only there was a chance to live, to live!

He became suspicious, fearful. In every approaching footstep he felt the oncoming of the fatal summons. He thought the curious faces that looked in through the door of his cell were getting more

frequent than formerly. And the prison chaplain—he was coming in every evening now—just as if that dank cell were a fit place for a pleasant conversation and a couple of cigars. Bad signs, bad signs! Something in the air!

And the questions the good chaplain asked him! Was he a good Christian? Yes, Father. He had never been disrespectful to any man of the church, never laying his hand upon a priest! Neither he, nor any of his family, either. When the village curate had told everyone to take to the hills and defend the legitimate king, hadn't he done so—with all his relatives? As complete proof of his good standing in the Faith, he drew a handful of grimy scapularies and medallions from under the rags he wore for a shirt.

The priest reminded him of Jesus, and of how Jesus, though the Son of God, had found himself in a precisely similar situation. The comparison did not fail to catch Rafael's imagination. What an honor! . . . But the other fellow inside him hoped the full honor would come to him as late as possible!

One day the news broke over him like a lightning bolt and a clap of thunder. Denied! Denied! His appeal had been dismissed by the authorities at Madrid. Death was on the way now—and not in a one-horse team! It was coming by telegraph.

A death watch told him that his wife—with a little baby born since he had been in jail—was walking up and down outside the prison, begging to see him! All over, then! If she had come all the way on from the village, the "business" must surely be at hand!

Ah, a pardon, a commutation! He clutched vehemently at this last hope which some one had suggested to him. A commutation, yes, why not? Others had had a pardon. And besides, when you think of it, that Lady up in Madrid, the *Señora,* the queen—what interest could she have in getting a poor man strangled? A mere matter of a signature!

Visitors were growing numerous now—officials with some duty in connection with the execution, other officials who came out of sheer curiosity; then lawyers, priests not connected with the prison, newspapermen. And trembling, suppliant, beseeching, he asked them all the same question:

"What do you think? Have I got a chance? Will She sign? Will She sign?"

They sent him word to be ready: on the following day he would be taken back to the scene of the crime, handcuffed, and under guard—like a steer freighted to the slaughter-house in a box-cart! There, in the village, the "operator" would be on hand with his "instrument."

The woman was still on watch outside the prison gate, hoping to catch a glimpse of Rafael as they

brought him out. She was a sturdy, dark-skinned girl, with thick lips and heavy eyebrows that joined over her nose. Dressed in her Sunday clothes—a short skirt bulging from the petticoats under it—she still made the air about her heavy with the pungent odor of dairy, barn, and stable.

Surprise and stupefaction, rather than fear, were written on her face as she stood gazing at the heavy door of the prison. She would break into tears from time to time as she looked down at the child clinging to her full bosom.

"*Señor!* What a disgrace for the family! I always knew that man would end this way! I wish we had never had this little girl!"

The prison chaplain came out to comfort her. Resignation! The ways of the Most High were dark and dreadful! But His children must accept them as mercies for their good. She would be a widow? But she might find, in the end, a man to make her happier than Rafael could ever have done!

The thought gave the girl courage. She had been in love before Rafael came along; but the boy had prudently retired when that strong-armed bully had shown his inclination for her. With Rafael safe in jail and about to be put to death, the young fellow had been loitering in her neighborhood in the village, or approaching her at work in the fields, as though trying to find a pretext for saying something to her.

"Yes," she assented. "It won't be for lack of a man!" And her face almost sketched a smile. "But I am a good girl. If I marry another one, he will have to be more like what the Lord expects us to be!"

The chaplain and the prison guards were shocked at this simplicity. She caught their expression, came back to realities, began to weep again.

The message arrived by telegraph that evening.

SHE had signed! Moved by petitions and appeals, the Lady up in Madrid, whom Rafael dreamed of as surrounded with all the splendors and adornments of the Eternal Fathers on the chapel altars, had consented to commute the sentence. The news turned the prison into pandemonium, all the convicts shouting and cheering as though an order for the release of all of them had come.

The chaplain hurried out to the woman sitting at the prison gate.

"Good news, my child! Good news! They are not going to kill your husband. You will not be a widow!"

The girl did not answer. She stood there bewildered, as though a thousand thoughts were in conflict in her brain.

"Good!" she said at last, and very quietly. "And when will they let him out?"

"Let him out? . . . Are you crazy, woman? You ought to be satisfied that we saved his neck.

He is in for life. They will send him to Africa. It's hard on a fellow, but he is young and strong. He'll be good for twenty years!"

The tears the girl shed now came from her whole soul—tears not of mourning but of despair and anger.

"Come," said the chaplain with a touch of impatience. "You ought to be thankful! You are tempting God. They have commuted his sentence, don't you understand? They aren't going to choke him to death, tomorrow. Aren't you glad?"

The girl stopped weeping, and her eyes gleamed with an expression of hatred.

"Good! They won't kill him. I am glad. He is saved . . . but I? I?"

She stood in silence for a time; and then she added, with a groan that shook her sturdy, sunburned, pungently odorous frame from head to foot:

"They have saved him—but me? They have condemned me! They have condemned me!"

A SERBIAN NIGHT

I

Eleven o'clock at night. It was the hour at which the theaters of Paris close their doors. Half an hour earlier the cafés and restaurants had sent their patrons to the street.

Our group stood undecided on the edge of the boulevard, while the crowds coming out of the amusement places slipped by in the shadows. The occasional hooded street lamps shed a ghostly light that was quickly absorbed in the darkness. The black sky with its starry blinkings of light drew uneasy glances. Once upon a time the night had only stars; now the sudden yellow expanse of a search-light might show the amber cigar of a Zeppelin.

We felt a desire to prolong our vigil. We were four: a French writer, two Serbian captains, and I. Where could we go in this gloomy Paris that had all its doors closed? . . . One of the Serbians spoke of the grill of a certain fashionable hotel which kept open all night to its guests. All the officers who wished to stay up slipped in there as though

they belonged to the house. It was a secret that brothers-in-arms of the different nations communicated to each other when they came to Paris to spend a few days. We cautiously entered the brilliantly lighted salon. It was an abrupt contrast to the dark street. That room was like the inside of a huge lighthouse, with its innumerable mirrors reflecting clusters of electric poppies. It seemed as though we had stepped back two years. Fashionable and painted women, champagne, violins sighing a negro dance with the sentimental quaver of a heart-breaking ballad,—it was all a spectacle of the days before the War. But among the men there was not a single one in evening clothes. All—French, Belgian, English, Russian, Serbian—were in uniforms that were dusty and worn. Some British soldiers were playing the violin, acknowledging the applause of the crowd with glittering smiles as cold as marble. They had taken the place of the former red-jacketed gypsies. The women pointed to one of them, whispering the name of his father, Lord ———, famous for his lineage and his millions. "Let us be merry, brothers, for tomorrow we die."

And all these men who had offered their lives on the altar of the pale goddess drank down life in great gulps, laughing, singing, loving, with the reckless enthusiasm of sailors who pass the night on shore to go forth once more at break of day to brave the hurricane.

II

The two Serbians were young, and seemed satisfied that the fortunes of their country had carried them to Paris, the dream city that had so often filled their thoughts during the horrible monotony of life in a provincial garrison town.

Both of them knew how to tell a story, an ordinary gift in a land where almost all are poets. Lamartine, when he passed through the then Turkish province of Serbia three-quarters of a century ago, was astonished at the importance of poetry in that country of shepherds and warriors. It was through verse that ideas and memories were handed down in a land where few could read or write. The *guzleros* were the national historians, and they all prolonged the life of the Serbian Iliad, by improvising new songs.

As the two captains drank their champagne they recalled the miseries of their retreat several months before: the struggle against hunger and cold; the battles in the snow, one against ten; the flight of the multitudes of human beings and animals in frightful confusion, while at the rear of the column the machine guns and rifles were cracking incessantly; the burning villages; the wounded and the stragglers howling among the flames; the mutilated women, and the crows hovering above them; the flight of old King Peter, crippled with rheumatism, without

other support than a gnarled stick, continuing his Calvary across the white precipices, stooped, silent, defying Fate like one of Shakespeare's kings.

I watched my two Serbs as they talked. They were sturdy lads, slender and sinewy, with extremely aquiline noses, like eagles' beaks. They had sharply pointed mustaches. From beneath their caps, like little houses with inverted roofs, there escaped heroic manes of hair. They were the type of artist that sentimental young ladies used to dream of forty years ago, but in mustard-colored uniform, and with the bold tranquil air of men who continually brush elbows with death.

They went on talking. They told of things that had happened a few months before, and it seemed as though they were telling of the exploits of Marko Krailovitch, the Serbian Cid, armed with a serpent for a lance, who fought with the *Wilas,* the vampires of the woods. Until very recently these men, now relating their experiences in a Parisian grill, had led the fierce pitiless existence of humanity in its cruel infancy.

Our French friend departed. One of the captains kept interrupting his narrative with glances at the next table. Two shadowy black eyes, framed by the brim of a huge plumed hat and the silky feathers of a white boa, had been fixed on him. They had caught his attention, beyond a doubt. Finally, as though drawn by an irresistible impulse, he moved from our

table to the next. A little later he disappeared, and with him vanished the hat and the boa.

I was left alone with the younger of the two captains, the one who had talked least. He took a drink, looked at the clock over the bar. He took another drink. He looked at me with one of those glances which always precedes a serious confidence. I divined his need for communicating to me something of a painful nature which was torturing his memory. He looked at the clock again. It was one o'clock.

"It was just at this time"—he began abruptly, putting his silent monologue into words—"four months ago today."

And as he talked I saw the dark night, the snow-filled valley, the white mountains covered with beech and pine trees, from whose branches the wind was shaking the cotton-like flakes. I saw the ruins of a village, and among the ruins the remnants of a Serbian division in retreat towards the Adriatic.

III

My friend commanded the rear of this guard, a mass of men, that had once been a company, and now was a mob. The military unit there had been increased by peasants so stupefied by suffering and fear that they moved like automatons, and had to be driven forward like animals; women moaning as they dragged along groups of little ones; and other

women, dark, tall, sinewy, who walked along in tragic silence, bending over the dead as they passed to remove their guns and cartridge belts.

The darkness was colored by the flickering red gleam of shells rising from the ruins. Out of the depths of the night came the response of other mortal flashes. In the black air the bullets hummed, invisible insects of the night.

With the morning would come the crushing, overwhelming attack. They did not know which enemy it was that was lining up against them in the darkness. Were they Germans, Austrians, Bulgarians, or Turks? . . . They had to face so many.

"We had to retreat," continued the Serb, "leaving behind those who delayed us. We had to make the mountains before daybreak."

The long columns of women, children, and old people, intermingled with the pack animals, had been swallowed up in the night. There remained in the village only the able-bodied men who were firing from the shelter of the ruins. Part of these in turn began to retreat. Suddenly a cruel recollection seized the captain.

"The wounded! What shall we do with them?'

Stretched out on the straw in a barn whose roof was pierced by shells, there were more than fifty human beings, sunken in the stupor of pain or tossing fretfully about. They were men who had been wounded days before and who had managed to drag

themselves that far; men who had been wounded that very night and who staunched the fresh blood with makeshift bandages; women who had been struck by bits of bursting shell.

The captain entered this refuge which reeked of decaying flesh, dried blood, dirty clothes, and foul breath. At his first words all those who still had any strength left moved restlessly under the smoky light of the solitary lantern. The groans ceased. There was a silence of surprise, of terror, as though those dying men feared something more dreadful than death.

On hearing that they were to be abandoned to the mercy of the enemy, all tried to get up; but most of them fell back again.

A chorus of desperate entreaties, of pathetic prayers rose toward the captain and the soldiers that were with him.

"Brothers, don't desert us. Brothers, for Jesus' sake——"

Then they slowly comprehended the necessity for abandoning them, and accepted their fate with resignation. But to fall into the hands of the enemy! To remain at the mercy of the Bulgarians or the Turks, centuries-old enemies! Their eyes added what their lips dared not say. To be a Serb is a curse when one is taken prisoner. Many who were at the threshold of death trembled at the idea of losing their liberty.

The vengeance of the Balkans is more to be feared than death.

"Brother, brother——"

The captain, divining the desires hidden in these cries, turned his eyes away.

"You want me to?" he asked several times.

All moved their heads affirmatively. Since this desertion was inevitable he ought not to go away leaving behind him a living Serbian.

Would he not have asked for the same thing if he were in their place?

The scarcity of munitions caused by the retreat made the soldiers guard their cartridges jealously. The captain unsheathed his sword. Some of the soldiers had already begun their task, using the bayonet, but their work was faltering, clumsy and rough, slashes at random, interminable agony, torrents of blood. All the wounded dragged themselves toward the captain, attracted by his rank, which made death at his hands an honor, and, through his skilful dexterity, less terrible.

"Take me, brother, take me . . ."

With the blade of his sword turned outward, he thrust the point into their throats, seeking to cut the jugular vein with one stroke.

"Tac, Tac," marked the captain, evoking the scene of horror before my eyes.

They came, crawling on all fours; they emerged

like larvæ from the shadows; they swarmed about his feet. At first he had tried to turn his head away, not to see what he was doing; his eyes had filled with tears. But the result of this weakness was that he struck clumsily, having to repeat the blows and prolonging the suffering. Be calm, then! A steady hand and a firm heart! *Tac—Tac.*

"Brother, take me! . . . Take me!"

They disputed about their turns as though they feared the enemy might arrive before the brotherly sacrifice was completed. They had instinctively learned what was the best position. Each one turned his head to one side, so that the neck might be tense, and the artery rigid and visible for the mortal prick.

"Brother, take me!" And as the stream of blood gushed forth, one more fell back against the other bodies that were slowly emptying like red wine bags.

* * * * *

The grill began to empty. Women leaning on uniformed arms passed, leaving behind them a wake of perfume and powder. The violins of the British breathed forth their last sighs, amid peals of light-hearted laughter.

The Serb had in his hand a small cream-colored knife, and with the gesture of a man who cannot forget, who never will forget, he went on pounding mechanically on the table. . . . Tac! . . . Tac! . . .

THE MONSTER

I

For a whole week that wedding had been the talk of all Paris, at least of the fashionable folk who gather every afternoon between five and seven to drink and to tango or merely to gossip. Maurice Delfour, heir of Delfour & Co. and a fortune of two hundred and fifty millions, was engaged to be married to the beautiful Odette Marsac, granddaughter of a celebrated political leader, now almost forgotten, who had been a candidate for the national presidency on two occasions.

The marriage of an industrial king and a republican princess is not an uncommon event in Parisian life, and ordinarily would not engage the attention of society for more than half an hour. But these two young people were so interesting: they were such favorites in the smart set!

He had been the central figure in many a woman's day and night dreams, as the perfect type of masculine charm and accomplishment. He was a huge social success. He had won the cup in several very aristocratic horse races; he had carried off first

honors and cups in countless fencing and shooting matches; and last, but not least, he had won the great Paris-Naples automobile race and still another cup. These glorious vessels, eloquent testimonials of his athletic prowess, covered every piece of furniture in his office, which was beginning to look like a dining room.

In recent years Maurice had added to his athletic record a certain scientific prestige. He had taken up aviation, and made flights almost every week. Perhaps this was the reason why he would knit his brows and put on a mysterious air whenever anyone discussed mechanical problems in his presence.

She was Odette, "the peerless Odette," among her friends; for the rest of mankind she was Mlle. Marsac, a name almost as famous as those of the greatest Parisian writers and painters, for it never failed to appear in leading social news, particularly in reviews of first nights, and her picture had been published by every fashion sheet.

The famous tailors of the Rue de la Paix, after laborious and feverish cogitations to evolve new forms of feminine attire, always counted on her to launch their sublime creations on the great days of Parisian life. Scarcely a hundred pounds in weight, her wonderful figure was the despair of her rivals, who sighed and turned pale with envy. Her shoulders were "ideal." Her finely modeled collar-bones

stood out in high relief and seemed to provide a base for the frail and graceful column of her neck. Her shoulder blades projected from her back like a pair of sprouting wings, and her long, straight limbs showed below the skirt with a freedom which betrayed no fear of inspiring evil thoughts or arousing temptation. A thin layer of flesh, sparingly distributed, covered the inner frame of her body and made it look like a mere pretext, something to hang clothes on, something to hold and carry them. And topping this supremely distinguished body, a long, smiling face with a pointed chin; a small mouth like a red cherry; a pair of black eyes like two large almonds; two curls hanging over the ears like the side whiskers of a toreador, the sort of toreador they conceive in Paris; and a pyramid of mixed hair built of real curls and false curls. She was the modern Venus whom fashion book designers see in their most inspired dreams.

Early in 1914 a new sport began to turn the heads of all the fashionable people of Paris and, by infection, of all other European capitals and the American continent. The smart set everywhere began to move feet and hips to the time of the tango, a dance recently imported from the Argentine republic. The leading figures in this "tangoing humanity" were Maurice and Odette. At the beginning of the fad Maurice had locked himself up with a dancing pro-

ressor who had arrived from Buenos Ayres the week before, and he had sworn by all his gods not to look again upon the light of day until he had mastered this new art as completely as he had conquered all the others. Being a man endowed with varied talents and considerable will power, he soon achieved success in the new sport. Carefully groomed, his stiff black hair brushed back, in a tight-fitting cutaway and high-heeled, light-topped patent leather shoes, he made his début one afternoon in the limelight of a famous hotel of the Champs Elysées, and won instant recognition and the admiration of the world as soon as he began to dance to the strains of the wild and voluptuous music of the tango.

Odette, who was dancing at the other end of the ballroom, shared with him, unconsciously, the admiration of the devotees of the tango. When it was over they drew one another with the attraction of two planets in close proximity, with the irresistible impulse of two elective affinities.

They met and never separated again. Henceforth each danced with the other and for the other, as if the world did not exist beyond the little circle described by their steps. Neither could find the measure of sublime rhythm except in the arms of the soul-mate. And thus, while going through the motions of the dance with thoughtful gravity, without breaking the mysterious silence of the sacred rite,

with all their intellectual faculties concentrated on the movement of the feet to avoid a false step, both suddenly realized the need of remaining united forever, of forming an indissoluble union—to dance on till the end of time.

And so they fell in love and were married. One morning all Paris got up two hours earlier than usual to go to the wedding, an imposing ceremony, the splendor of which was enhanced by the attendance of the principal bankers and industrial magnates of Paris, friends of the bridegroom, and a large number of political leaders, old colleagues of the bride's grandfather.

No one doubted that the union of these two young people would be a perfect idyl. Before his wedding Maurice had behaved like a true lover, taking leave, without hope of return, from the follies and caprices of his youth. Several women, high priestesses of the noblest arts, the comedy, the opera, and the dance, lost all hope of ever having again the millionaire Delfour among their admirers and patrons. No more follies! No more actresses, singers, or chorus girls! From now on Delfour was going to devote himself entirely to his little wife and to the study of serious things. And although Odette continued to flirt as she had flirted before her marriage, it was from force of habit—a harmless little game, an outgrowth of her light and happy disposition, which,

without provoking bold advances, gave her husband the exhilaration of ever-present danger.

They had established their present happiness and their illusions in the Delfour mansion, a sumptuous house built near Monceau park by the first millionaire of the family, among others, no less luxurious, erected by his business associates. Its rear face faced the park.

The elder Mme. Delfour retired to the top floor. She had known poverty in her youth, when her husband was a simple employee, and from her past privations and anxieties she retained a spirit of economy which made her live with great frugality amidst the splendors of this opulent house. She preferred to live in the top floor of the palace because it was there that they stored the antiquated pieces of furniture which represented her first luxuries, those bought when she and her husband began to get rich. She turned over the rest of the house to her son and daughter-in-law in order that the latter might satisfy without hindrance her ultra-modern tastes for decoration.

All the extravagances, all the absurdities of a hybrid style, a mixture of Byzantine and Persian art, invented by Munich artists, invaded this place, which was beginning to be venerable with its red and gold rooms and its massive furniture of the time of Napoleon III.

The elder Mme. Delfour, always in black, with her gray hair and the serious and thoughtful manner of a woman who knows the demands of life in all its diverse periods, accepted without protest all the innovations and whims of the new mistress. Odette organized luxurious oriental parties which disturbed the former peaceful and cloister-like palace. Its windows perforated with rectangles of bright light the gloominess of Monceau Park from sunset to sunrise, casting over its solitary avenues torrents of light and sounds of revelry. On other occasions the younger Mme. Delfour would give *thés-dansants,* and the automobiles of her guests filled all the surrounding streets, disturbing the peace of the neighborhood.

The style of dress of the bride disturbed also the customs and ideas of the old lady. Whenever she came down from the top floor where she had voluntarily retired, she would find her daughter-in-law wearing a tunic as narrow as a scabbard and made of some transparent material trimmed with enormous embroidered flowers. Odette did not seem to realize the indecency of these dresses, which barely covered her thin body. But as Maurice adored his little wife, the good old lady made efforts to justify all the whims of her daughter-in-law and to overlook her sudden fits of bad temper and the coldness with which she frequently treated her. "The poor child," good old Mme. Delfour would exclaim,

"grew up without a mother. She had the training of a boy."

II

Then the war came. One of its first effects was to distend the eyes of the younger Mme. Delfour with an expression of immense surprise.

"Is this calamity possible?" she complained. "Why should we have a war, now that people are enjoying themselves more than ever?"

While Odette seemed to shrink, surprised and frightened by the reality of war, her mother-in-law grew visibly more vigorous, shedding her former reserve and humility. She began to examine persons and things with a serious eagerness, as if she had not seen them for a long time and were making an effort to recognize them again. What she now saw was not entirely new to her. She had exchanged the first whispers of love with her departed in 1870, during the siege of Paris. Later, as a bride, she had lived through the horrors of the commune. She knew war, knew but too well its meanings and demands. That was why she was facing it unflinchingly, without false illusions, without deceiving herself.

At first Odette welcomed with a joy verging on enthusiasm the changes caused by the war in the habits of the nation. The war had brought her

some agreeable surprises, as if it had been a great, unexpected festival. And of all the unexpected joys, the sweetest was the sudden transformation of her husband. She saw Maurice in a new light, as a new man who was bringing her a second springtime of love. He was another husband. She thought she had married a mere stylish man, and now she found herself the wife of a warrior. The military uniform enhanced the manly traits which she had admired in him.

The proud Delfour wished to enter the air service, but aviation was not a success at the beginning of the war; it was then in a rudimentary stage, and Maurice, who did not care to remain idle in a training camp, decided in favor of the artillery, where he would have a chance to get into action at once.

When Odette was most enthusiastic about her husband, contemplating him as a future hero, Maurice was ordered to the front and had to leave her.

After the departure of her husband, Odette, to escape her loneliness, decided to do something useful for her country. All her friends were visiting the hospitals and taking short medical courses to qualify as nurses. She followed their example, planning to perform sublime deeds of abnegation, but inwardly admiring at the same time the white uniforms of the nurses, their blue cloaks and white toques, a simple and original dress, entirely distinct from those

others which ate up a fortune every year; something plain, cool, and comfortable, which suited perfectly her blonde type of beauty. The desire to exhibit this latest fashion, a war product, as she had paraded until recently the most expensive creations of famous Parisian tailors, caused her to neglect her patients time and again. She could not help it; she had to drive through the Bois de Boulogne to show the world her white dress with red crosses on the breast and sleeves.

Meanwhile, the elder Mme. Delfour, in her usual plain black dress, spent her days and her nights in a hospital which she was largely supporting.

Despite the sorrow and anxiety which her husband's absence caused her, Odette confessed that war had its pleasures and its compensations. She adored now the teas attended by women only, where she was free from those tiresome men who bore one to death with their gallantries. None of her friends showed any interest in the expensive clothes which had been the object of their illusions and desires before the war. All wore white, plain white dresses, like nursemaids in a summer resort, and they welcomed with pride the envious looks cast at them by other less fortunate women who could not wear the Red Cross uniform. They knitted garments for the soldiers at these teas, and although their work was awkwardly done, they went about it with self-assurance, as if

they had done nothing else all their lives, as if they had not been taught to do it a few weeks before by their own maids. Their conversation on matters of feminine interest was interrupted by inquiries about their absent husbands.

"My husband is fighting in Alsace," one would say, by way of introduction, "and Monsieur Delfour, where is he?"

M. Delfour was fighting on the Belgian front. And his wife would give out this important piece of information with a proud look. She would then recite with affected modesty his martial exploits. He had been cited twice. He had been decorated. He wore an extra stripe on his sleeve.

But the most stupendous exploits counted for little in this war. All men were brave. Heroes dropped from the sky. Odette had to make an effort to hide her disappointment when she found that all the other women could tell the same story about their husbands. How annoying to be unable to excel them in any way!

One day the sumptuous mansion in Monceau Park seemed to shake from the cellar, where the kitchen and servants' quarters were located, to the top floor, occupied by Maurice's mother, as if the old house had an emotional fit. The disturbance was caused by a terrible nervous attack of the younger Mme. Delfour, accompanied by tears, the slamming of

doors, the arrival of automobiles and the hurried visits of several doctors. Lieut. Delfour had been seriously wounded by the explosion of a shell.

Odette wished to rush to her husband's side. The elder Mme. Delfour had to make great efforts and call to her assistance the oldest family friends to convince her daughter-in-law that what she wanted to do was impossible. Women were not allowed at the front.

Then Odette wanted to die. Meanwhile her mother-in-law remained erect, silent, pale, biting her lips to keep her eyes dry.

After the first painful impression had passed and Odette began to meet her intimate friends again she felt a keen satisfaction. None of these women could now compare with her: "Maurice is wounded, seriously wounded," she would say with feigned modesty.

Her friends admired her with a certain envy, feeling sorry at the same time for that husband, once so fascinating, now so cruelly handled by war.

As her superiority over the other women was due entirely to the fact that Maurice had been wounded more seriously than their husbands, Odette became reconciled to the gravity of Lieut. Delfour's wounds, and she even felt hurt whenever any of her friends tried to minimize their seriousness. Frequently when she was alone and her thoughts strayed off toward

the absent one, she wondered what sort of wounds they could be. No one had described them. All her friends and relatives mentioned them without going into details. They were mysterious wounds, about which all felt the deepest concern without having seen them.

Odette, in her dreams about the future, saw Maurice slightly lame, leaning on a cane with one hand and with the other resting on his wife's arm. They would make an interesting couple. She was almost glad of this small physical defect, which would be a proof of his heroism. It would make him more fascinating. The future held in reserve for them many happy hours. And she would take care of her poor, wounded husband; she would protect him; she would be to him a loving wife and a tender mother.

One afternoon as she sauntered down the Rue Royale, she met a very young second lieutenant, almost a child, walking with his sweetheart; one of the sleeves of his uniform hung by his side, empty. Undoubtedly Maurice had lost an arm, too; she was sure of it. That's why his brief letters, in which she detected an effort, a strained, pitiful effort, to appear cheerful, were always dictated. He was forced to dictate them because he had not recovered sufficiently to write them himself. Yes, there was no

doubt about it: Maurice had lost an arm, like that poor boy. But it made no difference to her. He could lean on his wife. She had two arms to take the place of the one lost. The important thing was to be able to look into his face once more and to see herself in those clear, caressing, humorously ironical eyes of his. Ah, her poor, wounded dear, her hero! How she loved him!

Her intimate friends received her always with the same question: "How is Monsieur Delfour? Are his wounds better?"

"Better, much better. He will be in Paris soon," she always replied with assurance, although she had no definite news and her mother-in-law tried to avoid all conversation about her son.

Months passed. Letters and more letters continued to arrive, written by strange hands, but claiming to have been dictated by Maurice. The mother, concealing her uneasiness from the younger woman, questioned the old family friends, gentlemen of grave demeanor, who undoubtedly were withholding something from her, and who evaded all long discussions about the matter.

"He received many wounds," they told the old lady. "He narrowly escaped death, but he is out of danger now. Be brave, madame. The important thing is to save his life."

III

One morning Odette was suddenly awakened by some unexpected occurrence which had stirred the household. She jumped out of bed, raised a window blind, and saw a Red Cross ambulance standing outside the palace. The glass canopy over the steps leading to the house obstructed the view somewhat, but she could make out a group of men slowly ascending the front stairs, carrying with a certain care a bundle wrapped in blankets, as if it were a fragile piece of furniture. Her heart leaped. Her instinct was unerring. Maurice! It was her husband coming home at last! It could not be anything else!

Scarcely dressed and unaware of the scantiness and disorder of her attire, she ran downstairs and rushed into one of the rooms on the ground floor. All the servants, nervous and excited, tried to stop her. The oldest ones, with an inexplicable lack of respect, had even attempted to intercept her, blocking the way to the door, but Odette, brushing them aside with a strength which she had never suspected having, entered the room.

She recognized at once the aching head resting on the sofa, propped up with cushions. It was he, but horribly disfigured, his cheeks furrowed by the livid arabesques of terrible scars. Fifty years seemed to

have passed over his face in the course of a few months. His hair had turned completely white. But it was he! It was he! She noticed that, of his two eyes, only one was left. An effort had been made to conceal the loss with a black bandage which covered the outline of the empty socket and filled the shattered cavity. Then she saw his breast and the blue cloth of an officer's coat, and over the old, faded blue, the red ribbon of the Legion of Honor. And——

When she got to this point in her rapid examination Odette reeled as if she had been unexpectedly dealt an overwhelming blow. She shrieked.

The wounded man ended there! He had no arms and no legs. He was a mere trunk, miraculously preserved by the wonderful work of modern surgery —a mutilated shred of human flesh with a living head.

"Odette! Odette!" mumbled the blackish mouth as if imploring forgiveness for its own misfortune.

But Odette had fled, pushing aside the servants who crowded around the door, and she was now running through the rooms of the upper floors, utterly beside herself, tearing her disheveled hair and shrieking like the furies in a Greek tragedy, striking the walls, upsetting the furniture, crazy with fear, horror and loathing. She had dreamed of taking care of a wounded man, a wounded man like

the others, with a semblance of humanity left in his misfortune; but this cruel blow of destiny exceeded the limits of the imaginable, it went far beyond the uttermost bounds of ill-fate. And that monster was her husband! And she had to remain near him for the rest of her life!

The woman's cries as she wandered from one room to another filled the upper stories of the house and resounded below like the echoes of hopeless, interminable despair.

"Odette! Odette!" continued to moan the humble and distressed voice amidst the cushions on the sofa.

The only eye of the wounded man began to fill with tears. Everyone fled from his sight. Even the servants surveyed him from a respectful distance, each one trying to hide behind his fellows, aching to run away, and, at the same time, stretching his neck to catch another glimpse, moved by alternating impulses of curiosity and loathing. They avoided all contact with him as if he were some repulsive, gelatinous substance. He had thought he was still a human being; but no; he was a sort of cuttlefish with its arms broken off, a shapeless thing cast up by the horrible whirlpool of war, now sadly floating on the sea of life!

He who was worth millions; he who had loved life so dearly; he who was born with everything that

makes life worth living, wealth, strength, comeliness, was now left forever on the margin of life.

His misfortune had created a vacuum around the remains of his person. Even his favorite dog whined at a certain distance. The faithful animal had recognized him at once, as the dog of Ithaca had recognized the adventurous Ulysses when he returned in disguise. The dog had sought in vain his master's hand to lick it as he had done in times past! Then he had sought his feet, but these, too, were gone. The wretched animal had advanced and retreated, seized alternately by violent instincts of loyalty and fright.

"Ah!" the poor Maurice thought, "it will be like this forever!"

Why was he alive? Why couldn't he die?

Through the staircase which communicated with the upper part of the house the wails of the fugitive woman were still heard. She didn't want to see, she wanted to forget. Utterly crushed by the collapse of all her hopes, she lacked courage to face the future. The sight of that human wreck who retained but slight vestige of the man that had been filled her with overpowering fear.

Suddenly the group of servants which obstructed the doorway broke up. Someone had entered the room and was advancing with a firm step and a

grave and serene air which seemed to challenge destiny and its horrible whims.

The monster saw a gray head and a body dressed in black coming toward him. Then he felt on his mutilated cheeks the caressing touch of a mouth; then a kiss, a passionate kiss on the bandage which covered the empty socket. Eyes in which shone a love greater and more enduring than human love fastened upon his: warm tears dropped like dew upon his cheek; and two nervous arms, shaken by a passion of love, embraced his shapeless body as if they were going to rock it, as if the sofa were a cradle and the poor monster a new-born babe.

"Mother! Mother!"

"My son! My son!"

THE SLEEPING-CAR PORTER

I

At eleven o'clock at night the porter of the Paris-Rome express begins the operation of making a bed out of the back and seat of my compartment.

As he shakes out covers and unfolds sheets he begins to talk with the garrulousness of a man condemned to long silences. He must have this expansion for his thoughts and worries. If I did not happen to be standing in the door, he would talk to the pillows that he is stuffing into the fresh cases, holding a corner between his teeth.

"A sad war, sir," he remarks, his mouth full of cloth. "When will it end? My son, my poor boy——"

He is older than the porters used to be; he has not the air of the buttoned-up-to-the-chin steward who, in times of peace, used to come in response to a ring, looking like a gentleman who had seen better days, a *Ruy Blas* in disguise. This one looks like a workingman decked out in a chestnut uniform. He is strong and stocky, with rough hands and a grayish mustache. He talks familiarly; one can see that it would

cost him no effort whatever to shake hands with the passengers.

His son is dead; his son-in-law is dead. Both were employees of "the company," and the managers have given him a place so that he can support his grandchildren. Help has become scarce; besides, he knows Italian from having worked for a while in the arsenal in Genoa.

"I used to be an ironworker," he says with the air of pride of a conscientious union man.

A slight contraction of his mustache, equivalent to a bitter smile, seems to underscore this memory of the past. Such transformations! Then he adds by way of consolation: "One has to take things as they come. Some of my 'comrades' are now serving the country as ministers together with the bourgeoisie. I make up the rich folks' beds so my family can eat. . . . Alas, my son!"

I guess at his desire to pull a wallet from his breast pocket from which to take a certain dirty, rumpled document. Half an hour after I got on the train he had already read me two pages of it. It was the last letter from his son in the trenches.

I also know the story of the dead lad, slender, delicately built, with a light mustache that attracted the glances of the women traveling alone, making them appreciate the injustice with which fortune distributes her favors. He had been wounded in

Charleroi and cured in fifteen days; afterward he had been in the hospital two months; finally a shell hit him in one of those thousands of nameless struggles for the possession of a few yards of trenches. His father saw him just once in a hospital in Paris. Really he didn't see *him,* for all he saw was a mass of cotton and bandages on a pillow; something swathed like a mummy, and moaning with pain.

"His jaw was shot away, sir; he could not talk. His skull was fractured, too. . . . And then I saw him no more! Now I have him in a cemetery near Paris, and I go to visit him there whenever I have a day off."

He did not weep; he could not weep. His grief, instead of venting itself in tears, had spread through his soul, suffusing the convolutions of his brain like the vapor of a gentle madness. He talked to everybody about the dead boy. He saw the whole world through his dead son.

Nevertheless, now, he understands that I want to go to bed, and he leaves for the next day the continuation of his story, always new and interesting to him. "Good night!"

Half an hour later, as I lie there in the dark, I hear his voice in the corridor, rising above the creaking of the axles, the hum of the wheels and the grinding jolts of the car. He is talking with some English officers who are going to embark at Brin-

disi; he reads them the last letter of hope. The occasional moments of silence bring a line to my ear now and then, like bits of paper scattered by a whirlwind—"Papa, when the war is over. . . ."

II

A presence has entered which overshadows us all. The English officers, with all the decorations on their breasts and their skin tanned by the sun of Eastern campaigns, no longer exist. Some Italian countesses with coronets on the covers of their bags are left overwhelmed in their compartments. I humbly thank the leveling hand of progress that permits me to sleep separated only by a partition of wood from the person in the next section.

Two women dressed in black boarded the train in Paris. A group of men remained on the platform watching them with silent respect until they were out of sight. Some were in civilian clothes. They were quietly but well dressed, slender, smooth-shaven, with monocle beneath arching eyebrow. They seemed to be secretaries or attachés of the British Embassy. Others in the uniform of sailors, the service uniform, without trimming or braid, were leaning on their walking-sticks, and on the vizors of their caps they had the border of laurel which distinguishes officers of rank.

The name of one of the travelers circulates through the car. She is a duchess of the English court, a friend of the dead Queen Victoria. Fifty years of English history have passed over that figure, which must have been beautiful once, but which has grown puffy with age, and plebeianly red. A crown of white hair softens the high coloring of the skin; the eyes alone preserve in their majestic blue the reflection of past glory. She wears a small white bonnet beneath a long mourning veil. Her companion is taller, stiffer, less approachable, as if all the pride and arrogance that her mistress lacked were concentrated in the dried-up person of the maid. The duchess smiled at the overexpansive solicitude of the porter, while the haughty domestic received it with a cold, stony indifference.

Before I fall asleep there pass before my mind my recollections of this celebrated old lady, who is lying not two feet from me. I see her as I saw her many times in the English illustrated papers, with her diamond tiara and her corsage glittering with jewels and decorations, attending the world-famous jubilees and the coronations of the son and grandson of her royal friend. . . . She is a peeress of any number of titles. Whole streets of London belong to her; great parks where the fox runs, followed by a troop of red-coated horsemen, to the accompaniment of trumpet-calls; castles in Scotland, on the banks of

green lakes that recall the novels of Walter Scott; vast estates in Ireland that are sometimes the nightly witnesses of the deeds of the black-masked Fenians.

Her first husband was Viceroy of India, and there, seated on a white elephant in a little temple of gold, filigreed like a reliquary, she received the homage of brown, mysterious throngs.

Her second husband headed cabinets and arranged the destinies of the planet, by talking until midnight in the House of Commons with the men who symbolize the majesty of England, with hat on and feet cocked up on the chair in front of him.

Two lords, rivals of Beau Brummel, died for her. One shot himself, holding to his lips a lace handkerchief, his only favor from the high-bred duchess. The other, in desperation, became a Methodist preacher, and went to carry the Gospel to the South Sea Islands, where his first sermon wound up in a cannibal banquet.

This lady, shrunken with age, fat, her cheeks like two shiny red apples, has hunted the tiger in Asia, the hippopotamus and the lion in Africa. She has a yacht that is almost a transatlantic liner, on which she has lived for years at a time.

On all the surface of the globe there is not one spot that arouses her curiosity.

Before the train started the porter already knew what brought the duchess from her castle near Lon-

don. "She is going to Brindisi," he told me, "to receive the body of her grandson, who has just died at the Dardanelles."

III

It is well along in the morning when I step out into the corridor. The cold has made the windows opaque. Through the rivulets of steam one sees high, white mountains, forests of beech-trees hooded as with cotton, villages with thick layers of snow on the eaves of the houses.

We are crossing French Savoy. We ascend—with abrupt changes from the midnight of the tunnels to the glitter of the snow—the slope of the Alps. We are nearing Italy.

The old man is talking with the maid, who seems to have been made more human by the man's emotion. He still has in his hand the dirty, tragic letter, which he has just finished reading once more.

When I return from breakfast in the dining-car, I find him alone. He talks to me of the great lady who occupies an entire compartment and of her companion who is only a servant and who travels with as much comfort as the mistress. The money that duchess must have! And yet she suffers as much as he—perhaps more.

He has his daughter, her children, and the three

little ones of the obscure hero. The great lady has not a soul in the world. Her grandson was the only heir to her name and fortune. All the peerages and the millions will go to distant relatives.

He shows me a huge pasteboard box which just fits in between the two doors. A little while before, the maid had opened it part way for him to see. It contains a crown which is to be laid on the coffin of the aviator as it is lowered into the grave.

"It's a wonder! That tall skinny woman bought it in London. It is made of ferns and flowers, many flowers, that look like real ones. One could trim a hundred hats with them."

The "class-conscious" laborer reappears in this remark.

"Oh, money! It separates us even in death. And to think that when I visited my poor boy I could take him only a bunch of violets for ten cents!"

I see the duchess as I pass before the door of her drawing-room. She sits there, her head erect in her black-and-white bonnet, the veil down her back, gloved, rigid, just as I saw her the night before, as if she had not closed her eyes. She watches the snow-covered landscape skim by, but her thoughts are far away.

I bury myself in a book, but the murmur of voices in the next compartment distracts me.

It is the porter and the duchess who are talking.

I catch fragments of the letter of the poor dead boy: "Have confidence, papa. There are still happy days for us!"

My curiosity makes me stroll out into the corridor. The old man is standing with his cap on, as befits a man in uniform. The great lady has lost the brilliance of her well-preserved complexion; she has grown chalky, and has raised one gloved hand to her eyes. Perhaps she herself called the man to her to hear the story of which her companion has spoken to her; perhaps the old man had gone in without being called, made bold by his grief.

Back in my seat I hear the murmur of voices once more. Now it is the duchess who is reading, slowly, with the pauses that accompany a translation. She has in her hands the last letter of her grandson, and the porter, who cannot weep, groans with pain as the duchess pauses in her reading.

His interest and his grief forget the proper way of expressing themselves: "My God, what a boy! And to think that they die, madame, and good-for-nothings like us are left."

I pass once more before the open door. The old man has seated himself beside the great lady; she is weeping silently. His rough hands, without his realizing what they are doing, have clasped the delicate gloved one of the duchess in a caress of tenderness.

"Ah, madame! Ah, duchess!"

His voice is respectful and timid, but his hands and his eyes are sympathetic and tender. He talks with her as if she were one of the suffering mothers of the neighborhood, overwhelmed by bad news. Certainly the war has transformed all society. Socialists are now cabinet ministers, and old revolutionary working men caress the hands of weeping duchesses.

We are approaching the Italian frontier. I see the cock-feathers and the gray coats of the Alpine Chasseurs. The train stops before the first houses at Modane. We are going to change cars.

The porter with a painful effort comes back to reality and rushes wildly about, returning the passengers' tickets.

I give him five francs. "Thanks," and he leaves me, without even taking down my suit-cases from the rack. The British officers give him nothing. The Englishman assumes that everyone is paid for his work, and does not wish to offend with the alms called a tip. The countesses of the multiple coronets give him a two-lira piece, and he pockets it without even looking at them.

All his attention is concentrated on the duchess. He calls the station-men, handing down carefully the pieces of baggage. He goes with them to the edge of the platform to see that they are stowed carefully

into the cart. The great lady comes over to him to say good-bye, and he shakes hands with her before the scandalized eyes of her companions.

He feels something between his fingers which startles him and makes him look down. The duchess is familiar with the parsimony of her maid, who takes care of the payment of small sums, and it is she herself who tips him. A hundred francs! The old man hesitates; he sees his grandchildren, his daughter who works from early morning until midnight. But then he refuses it.

"Oh, no, madame!"

There are certain inviolable rules of courtesy and good breeding in his world just as in any other. He does not mind taking money from us; we are strangers who pass by him indifferently. But he is incapable of taking a penny for a service to a comrade, to a friend with whom he has clinked glasses. And he has drunk with the great lady; they have tasted together the wine of sadness and of sympathy, they have clinked their glasses running over with sorrow.

With the delicacy of a noblewoman she understands these confused emotions, and does not insist, putting back the bill. She says something in English, and her companion, visibly annoyed, takes from the cart a large box, the admired crown, and hands it to the old man.

"For your son," says the great lady; "for the hero's tomb."

And she goes off majestically in spite of her age, walking down the platform as if it were a reception-room.

The porter stands on the step of the coach, his arms filled by the box, overcome with shame that he cannot hide his tears, which run down, even to his stiff mustache.

"Oh, madame! Oh, duchess! Oh, madame! Oh, duchess!"

THE MAD VIRGINS

They were two sisters, Bertha and Juliette, orphan daughters of a diplomat, who had brought them up in distant countries of the Far East and South America; two sisters, free from all chaperonage, young, with a small income and numerous connections, who took part in all the gaities of Paris.

The afternoon-tea dances saw them arrive with perfect punctuality. A ripple of joy seemed to follow their footsteps.

"Here are the Maxeville girls!" And the violins sang more sweetly, the lights gleamed more brightly in the winter twilight, the men rolled their eyes, stroking their mustaches thoughtfully, and certain matrons instinctively pushed back their chairs, averting their eyes, as though they saw before them the embodiment of all the vices of the age.

There wasn't a girl who ventured to imitate their daring clothes, their eccentric gestures, their phrases of double meaning which gave such a piquant, provoking charm to the conversation of these two sisters. Not a daring fad had been launched in society that had not received their support. They had taken the first step toward fame dancing the "cake-walk"

in drawing-rooms many years before—oh, many, at least five or six—in that romantic age when people still loved such old-fashioned things. Afterwards they stood sponsor for the "bunny hug," the "tango," the "maxixe," and the "furlana."

Their thoughtless joy, when it exceeded the limits of propriety, scandalized the old ladies. But afterwards, even the most straight-laced could not help forgiving them. "Crazy little things, those Maxeville girls, but so good-hearted."

Everybody knew how they lived up on a fifth floor with one old domestic who acted as mother to them, sighing over the memory of the departed grandeurs of his Excellency, the minister plenipotentiary. All knew the pitifully funny attempts they made to keep up the appearances of their former station with their father's modest pension and the slender income from their mother's estate; their miraculous ability to dress well on very little money; their adoption of the most startling fashions, trying to hide under the cloak of originality the cheapness of their wardrobe.

The gossips whispered of their secret arrangements with dressmakers and milliners to make their things for nothing in return for advertising their creations. But this was the limit of the slander. Of their habits, of their home life, not a single word. The time-honored diplomatic families who had been

acquainted with the minister never had to remonstrate with them for inexcusable imprudence.

The indignation of the men was likewise proof of the virtue of these girls. Lovers ran after them, lured on by their outward free-and-easiness. Youths crowded around them like people at a bargain sale where all try to get there first. Provocative smiles, mysterious glances, words that seemed to breathe hope—and shortly afterwards one by one the conquerors turned back, furious and with lowered heads, like a dog that thought he had found a bone and bites on a rock.

"They're sharp, those little Maxevilles; impudent pieces, without a dowry, who are looking for husbands in their own way."

The very ones that talked this way about them finally gave them a nickname. The Misses Maxeville became known as "the mad virgins."

This nickname was entirely fitting. Nobody doubted for a moment either that they were mad or that they were virgins. They were like certain bankers who chat through the pay-window, smile, rattle the keys, and are forever arousing hope, but who never make the slightest loan, nor the smallest advance on your promissory notes.

The "mad virgins" were finally about to triumph in their desperate battle with the men. The older, Bertha, had interested a Russian engineer who was

willing to marry her. The younger had almost done the same thing with a young officer. It was necessary for him only to overcome the resistance of a proud, conservative, provincial mother.

Just at this point a heartrending trumpet-call, brutal and insolent, cut short the sensual music and the voluptuous dances in which humanity was drowsing. The War! . . . And the happy people rushed this way and that in terrified confusion.

The crowds packed about the East Station on the second day of mobilization saw the "mad virgins" arrive dressed in sombre, nun-like black, with little hats like caps and each with a bag and a package in her hand containing the indispensable necessities of life: two shirts and two pairs of stockings.

The "mad virgins" went off without excitement, without heroic phrases, without two lines in the papers. Their worldly connections had stood them in good stead in rapidly gaining their desires. They went to the front at Verdun, to the post of danger where all expected the first clash. They had a letter for the directors of the Sanitary Corps. They appeared taller and sturdier, and walked with a firm tread. Their beauty of fashionable Parisiennes had disappeared. They were women, like those who wept or cheered on the other side of the railing; without rouge, without false curls or other artificial

adornments, their cheeks untouched, and their eyes made larger by an emotion that had come to replace the former lines of black penciling; serene eyes which looked toward the future heroically, divining the approach of disaster.

Then they were lost in the multitude of men in uniform, horses, and cannon. And they were lost from the memory of all those who a week before had commented on their talk and airs. People had to think about their own fate; danger allowed them no time to look beyond that. Poor "mad virgins"! Unhappy dolls of Paris upset by the whirlwind while they were dancing and smiling with painted mouths to the sound of a music-box.

Now and then the women who had gathered to knit for the soldiers mentioned their names when they spoke of the dead and absent. "The little Maxeville girls?" They were doing heroic deeds in their own way at the front. Where they were, men died smiling. On several occasions they had gone even to the battle-fields, hearing the whistle of passing shells. The name of the older girl had been cited in an order of the day.

And always the same final comment: "They were good girls; a little crazy, but good-hearted."

A year of war passed. One day the news was circulated that Bertha had died, a victim of her self-sacrifice. And then a little later they mentioned her

nō more. Deeds of heroism are so frequent nowadays! So many familiar names drop out every day!

Months later, in a hospital set up in a ruined castle behind the fighting lines, I met the last "mad virgin."

I would not have recognized her. She was walking down an avenue of the park, almost running, her veil fluttering, and her emaciated limbs moving rapidly beneath her white skirt. She was carrying in her pale, transparent hands a package of clothes. Her nose and ears seemed like glass colored by the light of the sun. She seemed a diaphanous body, with the unhealthy transparency produced by physical suffering.

All her life was concentrated in her eyes.

A military doctor who was with me confirmed my recognition:

"It is Miss Maxeville, a young girl in society before the war."

The doctor had known her for some months. He had witnessed the horrible death of the sister, and it still made him shudder.

She had been infected trying to cleanse the wounds of a dying man who had been buried for three days in a shell hole. The poor thing's suffering had lasted forty-eight hours. She had slowly turned black with the expansion of the poisoned blood, howling in her death-agony. And the other sister had refused to leave her, embracing the con-

vulsive body, kissing the eyes that could no longer see and the mouth that only emitted groans.

"Bertha, sweetheart, don't die, don't die."

All their lives they had been together, united by their need of defense as orphans, by the joys that color poverty, by the desire of winning a position for themselves before their youth passed. And to see her die in agonizing torture before her very eyes, without being able to save her, without finding any means to soothe her last moments!

"Poor girl," continued the doctor, "she saw the only relative she had die like a mad dog. A little later she learned of the death of the officer who wished to marry her."

Everyone in the castle admired her energy.

"I don't know when she eats, nor when she sleeps. She is everywhere, and yet the wounded men fret when she is not there—'Tell Miss Juliette to come.' She is the doctor of morale in this house. In many cases she can do more than we can. She and her sister made marvelous cures."

I saw them in my mind's eye—as I listened to the doctor—going from room to room, like apparitions of health that scatter about them the sweetness of life. They were a little reserved with the officers. These were men of their world and perhaps for this they thought them dangerous, and did not pass beyond a grave natural solicitude with them.

But they became transfigured when they passed to

the floors occupied by the herd of suffering soldiers, lightening with their happiness that atmosphere of groans, drugs and wounded flesh.

The memory of mothers and sweethearts stood out clearer when evoked by their lips. They described the smiling native land of which the soldiers so soon to die were dreaming. With the instinct of women of the drawing-room, they selected the conversations that would be most agreeable to each man. The older one had spent a week talking of the Iliad and the Odyssey with a student who was dying slowly, thinking of his doctor's thesis which he would never read in the Sorbonne. In the meantime Juliette wrote letters. The rude sailor of Brittany, the peasant of the interior, the scoffing workman of Paris, the gloomy Moor, the puerile negro, saw unknown beauties, unsuspected landscapes open before her pen. The white lady was poetry, the joy of life that came to them.

"Kiss it," Juliette would order, holding a flower she had just picked in the park before the lips of a wounded man. "A smart lover must always send such remembrances to his sweetheart." And she enclosed the flower in the letter, which was a source of admiration to the signer, touched and flattered at signing such tender lines.

An hour before dawn—the fatal hour in the hospitals—when day is just breaking and the dying pass

away—the agonized death rattles always murmured the same wish: "Tell one of the ladies to come."

And they who had just fallen into that heavy slumber that precedes the daybreak, came running to witness another death agony, to encourage a limp hand by the pressure of their own, to dissuade the footsteps of Death with their words that sounded like golden coins, with their laughter like the tinkling of thin glass.

"And the poor little thing," continued the doctor, "is going on with the holy work of cheer. When she is alone she thinks of the other one, and of the dead officer, and she rushes to the dying, as though in another's grief she found her solace. The incurable ward, where those who are dying are put, is her favorite spot. There she sings, when a little before she was sighing alone; laughs with her eyes full of tears.

"We pretend not to see what she is doing. What good are rules in the presence of death? The important thing is to give a little joy to those who are going forever. Everybody does good after his own fashion. Last night I came upon her using her own method in the ward of the dying. We have a Moroccan sharpshooter there with his legs and abdomen shot to pieces. Each moment seems as though it were going to be his last; he may have died already.

There's a German in the next bed. They put him there by mistake and now it is too late to move him.

"The men of Europe forget their grudges when they reach the limits of life. But this African is of long-enduring wrath. When he thinks nobody is looking he shows his fist to the enemy next to him, who watches him with round, astonished eyes, as though he were still on the battle-field. Miss Maxeville rushes toward them at once, pretending to be angry.

" 'What's this, Ali? Be still, or I'll get cross with you.'

" 'Don't you be cross,' murmurs the Moor. 'I'll not hurt him if you don't want me to. But tonight when you go away, I'll go to his bed and cut off his head.'

"And he can't move. Last night he was shrieking with pain, disturbing the silence of the room with his screams, waking up the other wounded, struggling to get up to satiate his fury on the German.

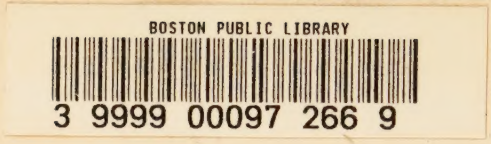
"Miss Maxeville is the only one who can calm these men. I saw, in the faint light of the room, how she began to dance, a plate in her hand, which she used as a tambourine. Her hips and breasts swayed in time to the monotonous Oriental air she chanted. She smiled like a village woman dancing before the tribe.

"The sleepy wounded looked out from under the covers, struggling to sit up. The black lips brightened with a faint smile; the burning eyes eagerly followed the body of the dancer which was tracing a procession of silhouettes on the walls.

"The Moor had raised himself like a jackal trying to jump with broken legs. His admiration escaped in hoarse groans:

" 'Oh, smile of twilight! . . . Oh, sunshine of the darkness! . . . Little white lady!' "

THE END



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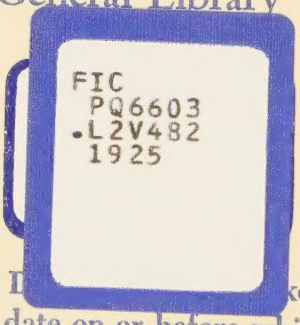

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